Personal Opportunity Plans

Conditions and Considerations for Effective Development
and Implementation of Personal Opportunity Plans
by the Commonwealth, Districts, and Schools

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Table of Contents

1. The case for Personal Opportunity Plans

This paper contributes to the movement for a shift from "standards-based" reform to "supports-based" reform, which provides the necessary resources for every student to learn, succeed in school, and craft a productive future. "Access to student-centered learning and personalized academic, social, and healthy plans to keep all students on a college path" is a key dimension of a supports-based orientation to school reform (Jackson 2013).

Personal opportunity plans (POPs) support young people at every step along their path toward a satisfying and successful future. Indeed, many educators would contend that helping students develop personal learning goals linked to their future aspirations should be a primary purpose of schooling. Others would go even further and suggest that this developmental process of "becoming" and planning for the future is a basic educational right that every student deserves.

There is strong evidence that personal opportunity plans in conjunction with personalized, student-centered learning and effective and timely academic, behavioral, and mental health supports and interventions achieve the following results (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth 2014; Gysbers 2008; Rhode Island Board of Regents 2010):

1. Better attendance
2. Better grades
3. Increased graduation rates
4. Better employment and postsecondary learning matches for students with disabilities
5. Increased percentage of students applying to college
6. Increased percentage of students enrolling in college
7. Increased percentage of students who complete a postsecondary degree or certificate program

There is a growing national consensus at state and district levels to mandate completion of personal opportunity plans, particularly for middle and high school students. However, a profound gap exists between asserting the value and benefits of personal opportunity plans and ensuring that schools have the vision, resources, capacity, and commitment to implement personal opportunity plans with integrity and fidelity.

Educators must consider, for example, how and whether personal opportunity plans support a school's mission, vision, and core beliefs about the purposes of education. School leaders must think through their capacity and commitment to reconfigure personnel roles and responsibilities, broaden and deepen student-centered learning opportunities, modify the school schedule, and strengthen learning supports and interventions in order to implement personal opportunity plans equitably and effectively.

Thus, efforts to advocate for the adoption of personal opportunity plans must provide education and policy leaders with information that generates a full and nuanced understanding of the

beliefs, conditions, personnel resources, and organizational structures necessary for successful adoption.

2. Introduction: A Snapshot of Personal Opportunity Plans

This paper aims to present a fully-realized iteration of the Personal Opportunity Plan (POP) process and identify specific conditions and considerations that support effective implementation of POPs. The paper pays particular attention to describing what it takes to develop a POPs initiative that fully supports underserved and underperforming students in large schools.

What is a Personal Opportunity Plan?

A Personal Opportunity Plan is a student-centered and student-directed process and a set of documents that maximize students' academic, personal, college and/or career development and fosters success in school and life. "It is not a one-time activity but an ongoing process by which the student defines, explores, and then refines his or her interests and goals throughout middle and high school. Students usually begin using a learning plan in middle school, typically during the 8th grade, to guide their decisions about high school courses and start a process of career and college exploration" (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability and Youth, 2013).

- POPs support students' learning and opportunity planning from one year to the next.
- POPs support students' self-assessment of their academic progress, college and career readiness, and personal development.
- POPs support student and parent review and reflection of students' school data.
- POPs support students in making the best match between their personal strengths, academic qualifications, interests, and study and career aspirations on the one hand and the right postsecondary opportunity on the other.
- POPs engage students (and families) in activities and work tasks focused on completion of graduation exit requirements and postsecondary plans.
- POPs document students' school accomplishments; participation in youth development opportunities; and recognitions, honors, and awards.
- POPs track students' behavior and physical, social, and emotional well-being.
- POPs track the status, progress, and results of academic, behavioral, and mental health interventions.

Words matter: Implications of choosing the words "Personal" and "Opportunity" to describe a student plan

Educators and advocates might choose to use any of the following monikers to describe the concept of on-going student planning in school: Personal Learning Plan, Individualized Learning Plan, Postsecondary Plan, Personal Postsecondary Plan, Personal Academic Plan, College and Career Plan, or School Transition Plan. By qualifying the student planning process

with the words "personal" and "opportunity," POPs have an even greater potential to become meaningful and empowering experiences for the entire range of learners. Here's why:

A personal plan:

- Values a holistic view of each child affirming the unique characteristics of each individual person – his/her learning profiles, abilities, strengths, talents, interests, aspirations, and personal qualities and character – and assumes that the sum of these characteristics will inform students' thinking about their plans and the big and small decisions from one year to the next.

- Implies that a plan is student-directed with the support of students' teachers, peers, and families (a POP is done *by* and not *to* a student).

- Implies that the process involves some degree of self-directed choice in selecting the right courses and learning experiences that maximize intellectual, personal, and social development.

- Implies a flexible, adaptive process and personalized pacing that fits each individual's needs, interests, and stage of cognitive, social, and emotional development rather than a lock-step, one-size-fits-all approach.

- Calls for goals that move beyond school transition planning (middle school to high school) or postsecondary planning (high school to college and career) to include personal growth and development.

- Implies a relational process that fosters lively dialogue and thoughtful planning with peers, school staff, and families.

> **Considerations:** If personal engagement with adults and peers is not a priority throughout the planning process, the completion of a POP can turn into a rote fill-in the blank or "click the box" exercise leaving students bored and disengaged.
>
> If students experience an abject lack of choice or a severely limited range of learning experiences—few or no opportunities to 1) choose courses, electives, content study within a course, assignments, projects, and assessments or 2) participate in co-curricular, extra-curricular, and other youth development opportunities—the completion of a POP can turn into an inauthentic task bereft of the kind of learning and life experiences that help students discover their strengths, talents, interests, hopes, and aspirations. POPs will not be personal if the vast majority of a student's learning experiences are coercive, adult-driven, or restricted to a narrow regime of required core academics.

An opportunity plan:

- Encompasses more than narrowly-defined educational experiences focused primarily on academic course work. An opportunity can be any experience inside or outside of the regular school day and regular school year that supports students' intellectual, social, personal, and career development, mastery, or leadership.

- Implies an inclusive perspective about students' future aspirations—one that values all types of opportunities after high school graduation.

- Implies more than an academic plan focused on doing what it takes to earn high grades and high test scores in order to be prepared for the next schooling experience.
- Implies an equal focus on present and the future experiences—the plan is about more than postsecondary preparation.

Considerations: The POP's process is built upon a schools' commitment to educational equity and the belief that all young people can learn and deserve a high-quality education. Equitable schools are dedicated to fairness, create access, and close gaps. They hold high expectations and provide high supports. In this context, schools that focus most of their planning activities on students' efforts to "get into college" without an equal emphasis on exploring viable career options that match a student's personal learning profile, strengths, and interests do so at considerable risk. Opportunities that might ignite a student's motivation and commitment to continue learning might be missed altogether. The combination of pushing all students to plan for and enroll in post-secondary education, combined with facilitating exploration of meaningful choices that match aspirations, enhances life opportunities for each and every student.

A freshman experiences the POPs process

We have chosen to present a picture of the POPs process during freshman year for several reasons. Academically and developmentally, the transition to high school is a singular turning point in the lives of adolescents. Navigating this new school setting brings with it equal doses of anticipation and anxiety for most students. Moreover, we know that completing freshman year on-track by earning a full year of credits is the surest path to graduation and success beyond high school.

Anthony is an average student who has earned mostly Cs and a few Bs in middle school. Reading has generally been both a struggle and unpleasant experience for him. He is a bit shy and worried about making friends. Anthony and his family participate in freshman orientation before the official school year begins. They and other students and parents in his POPs cohort meet with his POPs coach who serves as the primary contact between Anthony and his family. The POPs coach discusses her role in supporting Anthony's academic, social, and emotional development and progress throughout freshman year and lays out the learning expectations for freshmen. She explains why the push for good grades and strong attendance in freshman year has such huge long-term pay-offs (Allensworth, 2007). His POPs coach shares an overview of Freshman Seminar that meets once a week. She invites students and families to walk through the benchmarks related to goals, personal development, academic habits and progress, and college and career exploration that are addressed throughout the year in Seminar.

Anthony has a buddy in Seminar and is relieved to discover that other kids have some of the same questions he has about high school. Five essential activities will be repeated in Freshman Seminar every quarter. Anthony will 1) create personal and academic goals, 2) assess his academic performance and progress toward achieving these goals at mid-quarter, 3) explore options and choose an activity in or out of school that matches his interests, 4) review his BAG

check (behavior, attendance, and grades) every week, and 5) assess his overall academic performance at the end of the quarter.

In addition, Anthony meets informally with his POPs coach several times during first quarter for brief personal conferences to check in on how his transition to high school is going, explore what activity might capture his interest (this took a little probing), and discuss why and how a required reading tutorial will support his academic goals. Anthony loves getting 'booster' text messages from his coach that buoy up his persistence and confidence.

During the second semester, Anthony completes an interest-career inventory and has his first opportunities to explore possible career pathways and postsecondary options. At the third quarter report card conference, he shares his course work portfolio, discusses what he will do to improve two grades, and with his parents he reviews and makes his final selection of courses for next year.

Later in the spring, his POPs coach is there for him when his mom's hospitalization affects his attendance and his school performance. Together, they create a revised plan that will help him achieve his goals. His POPs coach checks in with him weekly to support his efforts and reassures his mom that she has full confidence in Anthony to successfully complete freshman year. One of Anthony's big goals was to earn a B in English—he does! In June, he beams with pride when he becomes a newly minted sophomore at the end-of-year Step-Up Ceremony.

3. Personal Opportunity Plans are Different at the Elementary and Secondary Levels

Elementary K-5 POPs: More informal, much less complex

Many activities associated with POPs are embedded in the day-to-day work carried out in self-contained classrooms by a home-base teacher who has primary responsibility for facilitating the academic progress, healthy growth, and personal development of 25-30 students. Even in schools where students move to other teachers for specialized math, reading instruction, or fine arts, they spend the majority of the school day with one teacher who becomes the de facto POPs coach for her home-base group of 25-30 students. The benefits of spending many hours every day teaching multiple subjects to one group of students cannot be underestimated – elementary teachers have the time and flexibility to integrate POP-type activities into a wide range of lessons and learning units.

For example, ritualized POPs activities for fifth graders might include: hopes and dreams at the beginning of the school year, regular goal-setting and reflection related to what students are learning in various subjects, practice and assessment of social and emotional skills and habits of learning embedded in weekly lessons and routines, assessment of academic progress during quarterly conferences with students and parents, specific opportunities for academic choice and interest-based learning across subject areas, interdisciplinary learning experiences that promote personal discovery and mastery, and career and college exploration by inviting parents and local community members to share their stories and experiences.

When students experience academic, behavioral, or health problems that require support and interventions beyond the capacity of the home-base teacher, communication to the school

counselor or other academic, behavioral, health support staff is direct and immediate. In addition, most K-5 schools deliver an array of precisely targeted academic interventions within an RtII (Response to Instructions and Intervention) framework for students with severe learning gaps (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012).

At the elementary level, a commitment to the following strategies communicates transparent support for the goals and interests behind the POPs process without creating additional layers of structures, programs, or personnel.

1. Grade level consensus and articulation of specific POP-type activities that all students experience within a particular grade. (Note the fifth grade example above.) Ideally, counselors might work with each grade level team to plan and even co-facilitate some essential POPs activities.

2. A school-wide commitment to ensure that every student is attached to at least one activity during the regular school day or out-of-school time that holds particular interest and engagement for that particular child. Many elementary schools create their schedule of electives, choice periods, and after-school activities with this commitment to students' interests in mind.

3. Full articulation of procedures, protocols, and scaffolded interventions (RtII) within a case management system for students who need more targeted academic, behavioral, and mental health supports and services beyond the classroom teacher. This strategy involves identifying specific criteria, conditions, and behaviors that place students at risk and then ensuring that students receive the right interventions aimed at reducing and eliminating these risks and barriers to learning and healthy growth and development (Smith, 1995).

Secondary 6-12 POPs: More complexity demands a more formal and structured approach

Seven challenges make POPs more complicated to organize, coordinate, and deliver in middle and high schools:

1. "It's Not My Job to Teach This": Unlike elementary schools, there is no home-base teacher who serves as the de facto POPs coach for her cohort of 25 to 30 students whom she teaches most of the day. Secondary faculty, on average, teach 150 students every semester. Moreover, the process and activities associated with POPs lie outside of a teacher's primary responsibility to deliver a discipline-specific curriculum. However, the content of POPs (academic advisement; personal development; intensive career and college exploration, planning, and preparation; and developmental college and career readiness skills and mindsets) is clearly within the domain of counselors and the guidance department…

2. "There Is No Way I Can Make this a Personal Process for Every Student": Given the ratio of one counselor to 432 students in MA, counselors' sincere commitment to engage in a personalized POPs process with every student is difficult to deliver (US Department of Education, 2009-2010; The College Board, 2012). Surveys suggest that student planning feels impersonal for most students and does not include enough opportunities to engage in mediated conversations that help sharpen students' thinking about their current and future

plans (Public Agenda, 2011). Even when schools reconfigure staff roles so that every student has access to a "high touch" POPs coach at every grade level…

3. "There Is No Time in the Schedule to Do This": Schools must re-imagine the schedule to allocate regularly scheduled opportunities for all students to engage in the POPs process. Although most students will be able to complete POPs tasks within formally scheduled sessions, some students will always need….

4. More Time for Completion of Critical POPs Tasks: From eighth grade onward, POPs goals and outcomes are directly related to students' completion of major academic milestones and planning tasks that require significant outlays of time and effort. Helping every student meet these requirements is a monumental endeavor that involves an additional layer of adult support to provide feedback, follow-up, and interventions. And speaking of interventions, an effective POPs process depends on …

5. A High-Functioning Case Management Team and Timely Interventions: Increasing numbers of secondary schools are developing "early warning" systems to identify students at greatest risk in order to implement targeted academic, behavioral, and mental health interventions that are timely and predictable. However, the data pipeline that helps student support staff match the right student diagnosis to delivery of the right intervention gets clogged because…

6. Collecting, Managing and Synthesizing Accurate Data Sets Proves to Be an Arduous Task: Schools face multiple challenges in their efforts to merge, share, and review data from various data sets that are often operated by different software programs, housed in different offices, and managed by different staff. POPs require timely entry, easy retrieval, and weekly review and dissemination of huge amounts of data and student documents throughout the year. Thus, the final condition that makes POPs complicated is a…

7. Greater Dependence on Technology: Beyond the need for sophisticated electronic student information systems, many POPs activities involve career and college exploration and searches that are IT-dependent. Schools need to ensure that the right technological hardware and software are operational and then create a schedule that provides all students access to computer time.

The adoption of POPs at the state and district level is generally considered a middle and high school initiative. Nearly all of the research literature, reports, pilot projects, and planning documents are aimed at middle and high school leaders, practitioners, and policy makers. Consequently, the remainder of the report focuses on the adoption and delivery of POPs at the secondary level.

4. Philosophical, Pedagogical, Instructional, and Curricular Beliefs that Support Personal Opportunity Plans

A broad and balanced set of goals and purposes for schooling support POPs

Since implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, the goals driving secondary education are proficiency in reading, writing, and math and the development and mastery of academic college readiness skills. Particularly in urban schools, this focus has resulted in narrowing the curriculum to mostly required core academic courses that compromise the commitment to a broad and balanced set of goals for American public schooling. Richard Rothstein has identified eight educational goals that have withstood the ebb and flow of reform movements over the last 160 years. They are: (1) basic academic skills, (2) critical thinking, (3) arts and literature, (4) preparation for skilled work, (5) social skills and work ethic, (6) citizenship, (7) physical health, and (8) emotional health (Rothstein, 2008).

Considerations: Meaningful alignment between a school's mission and the POPs process might require many schools to consider adopting a broader set of goals that aim to foster personal and social development and self-directed learning as well as prepare students for responsible citizenship and whatever postsecondary education or career pathway they may choose.

Personalized, student-centered learning supports POPs

Schools that believe in personalized, student-centered learning look and feel different from schools that don't because the former's primary educational aim is learning for personal meaning, mastery, and excellence rather than achieving proficiency on standardized tests (the NCLB single measure of performance).

Although the descriptors "personalized" and "student-centered" are often used interchangeably, we find that "personalized" often refers to a more global set of educational practices and "student-centered" generally refers more specifically to "anytime, anywhere" learning that "extends beyond the traditional school calendar and classroom walls, requiring students to take shared responsibility for learning in a variety of settings, including real-world situations and projects where teachers act as coaches and guides" (Miller Lieber, 2009; Wolfe, Steinberg, & Hoffman, 2013).

Personalized learning practices enable teachers to "meet learners where they are in terms of their capabilities, interests, attitudes, and other intrinsic motivational considerations " (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA 2001). Four teaching practices cut across the literature and research that describe personalized and student-centered learning:

1. Strong relationships between students and teachers that communicate high expectations and provide high social and emotional support

2. Appropriate challenge levels, assessments, and learning supports for each student (Different groups of students need different kinds and amounts of time, tasks, attention, and supports in a variety of places and ways to succeed academically, behave responsibly, and develop and strengthen personal and social efficacy.)

3. Choices in courses and curricular and instructional tasks that are relevant and personally meaningful (what students learn, how they learn it, how they demonstrate their understanding and mastery)

4. Supporting students' social, emotional, and identity development with particular attention to skills and habits that foster self-regulation, self-management, self-direction, and life-long learning

Current research projects focusing on "student-centered" learning have identified several other features of this educational approach (Wolfe, Steinberg, & Hoffman, 2013; Silvernail & Stump, 2012; Smith & Shea, 2013).

1. A shift toward competency-based learning that decouples learning and earning course credit from "seat time" in a classroom. The Carnegie unit (120 hours = one unit of study) was created in 1906 as a way to standardize both college admission criteria and the reporting of the high school experience (Miller Lieber, 2009). There is no reason beyond precedent that compels schools to remain attached to a formula that equates seat time with learning or presumes that all students require the exact same amount of time to achieve proficiency in a specific course of study. The shift to competency-based learning promotes flexible scheduling to accommodate learning opportunities outside of the school and outside of the regular school day such as community service, place-based learning and internships, and curricular projects linked to real-world issues in the local community and the larger world that get students out and bring interesting people in.

2. A shift toward more project-based learning that often integrates skills and knowledge from multiple disciplines in the service of solving a real-world problem

3. A shift to more intentional integration of a wide range of technologies in teaching and learning across all academic disciplines

4. A shift to personal learning plans for every student (not just special education students)

Considerations: The universe of digital and "blended" learning has co-opted the phrase "personalized learning" to describe what turns out to be mostly individualized programmed instruction on a computer that is neither personalized nor student-centered. The vast majority of computer-based learning opportunities involve adult-designed, individually-paced direct instruction in required core courses; assigned remedial work in core academic courses; or credit recovery tasks to earn credit in required courses after a student has failed the course.

A commitment to strengthen students' academic college and career readiness skills and mindsets supports POPs

College and career readiness is the new secondary mantra. The good news is that college professors, employers, and vocational-technical instructors all agree on the academic skill sets and mind sets that help prepare students to be academically college- and career-ready (Miller Lieber, 2014).

These include skills such as proficiency in reading; fluent writing; problem solving; critical reasoning; analysis and interpretation; argumentation and proof; creative thinking; inquiry, investigation, and research; organizing and constructing work products and performances; and monitoring, revising, correcting, and editing (Conley, 2007).

Academic mindsets that empower a student to identify as a learner, a career planner, and a college-goer speak to a student's capacity and commitment to learn and achieve:

"I belong in this academic community." (I identify as a learner.)

"My ability and competence grow with my effort." (I can improve my performance.)

"I can succeed at this." (I know I can.)

"This work has value for me." (I am invested in my own success.)

"I am planning for my future." (I am a college-goer or I am on track for employment after high school.)

A literature review on non-cognitive dimensions of college and career readiness from the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago reveals a strong relationship between these mind sets and perseverance and engagement, where "perseverance" is defined as the tenacity to sustain attention and stay focused on a goal and an equal push for completion, quality, and high performance, and "engagement" is sustained learning that involves students emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally (Farrington, Roderick, Allensworth, et al., 2012).

Principles of youth development support POPs

The POPs process and POPs activities reflect a youth development orientation and a commitment to build an equitable and comprehensive educational program that enables all students to experience a redundancy of opportunities and supports (Miller Lieber 2009). (Redundancy involves intentional efforts to ensure that students experience multiple "hits" of the same opportunity over time and multiple opportunities to practice and demonstrate the same skills and competencies over time (Best Practice Briefs, 1998-1999).) These opportunities and supports:

1. Increase pro-social bonding among peers and develop positive and personalized relationships between adults and adolescents.

2. Set clear, consistent boundaries, procedures, and standards of accountability.

3. Model, teach, and allow for the practice of life skills that promote respect, responsibility, self-discipline, effective communication, problem solving, and cooperation.

4. Provide a saturation of youth development opportunities through student-centered learning, student leadership, voice and choice in the classroom, meaningful participation in school life and in the larger community, and exposure to the world of work and college.

5. Cultivate within youth a positive sense of identity and hope for the future.

6. Set high expectations that promote positive social norms and a culture of excellence and achievement.

7. Provide caring and personalized support so that students can thrive emotionally and succeed academically.

The words "being," "belonging," and "becoming" nicely capture the personal exploration component of the POPs process:

Being refers to "defining who I am" (physical, psychological, spiritual) through a process of exploring personal values, attitudes, awareness, and behaviors.

Belonging refers to "finding my place in the world" through experiences that enable a young person to explore his or her fit within multiple environments (physical, social, community) and develop healthy relationships with others.

Becoming refers to "achieving my personal goals, hopes and aspirations."

Young people who successfully complete these developmental tasks are better prepared to make a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood.

A commitment to strengthen students' developmental college and career readiness skills supports POPs

"The traditional view of college readiness, which has for many schools focused primarily on improved academic performance, may fail to fully capture the developmental processes required for youth to enter, succeed in, and graduate from postsecondary education and training. Increasingly, researchers and policy analysts recognize that the necessary qualities for persistence in and completion of postsecondary education involve more than just academic components (Hooker & Brand, 2009)."

Surprising to many, "Students' course grades, grade point average (GPA) and class rank are vastly better predictors of high school and college performance and graduation, as well as a host of longer-term life outcomes, than their standardized test scores or the coursework that they take in school. Why? Grades reflect the degree to which students have demonstrated a range of academic behaviors, attitudes, and strategies that are critical for success in school and in later life, including study skills, attendance, work habits, time management, help-seeking behaviors, metacognitive strategies, and social and academic problem solving skills that allow students to successfully manage new environments and meet new academic and social demands" (Farrington, Roderick, Allensworth, et al., 2012).

However, it is no surprise that students who know how to study, who can accurately assess their level of mastery and understanding, who can manage their time and direct their own learning, and who know how to persist when tasks are difficult or ambiguous have much higher rates of getting and staying employed and getting and staying in college. Mandy Savitz-Romer calls

these "developmental college and career readiness skills" (Savitz-Romer and Bouffard 2012). Supporting students' intentional development of these skills and behaviors is particularly critical for students who have been underrepresented in higher education. These skills include:

- Academic self-management
- Work habits / study and organizational skills
- Employability skills
- Personal efficacy skills
  - Persistence
  - Focus
  - Self-regulation
  - Self-management
  - Self-awareness

5. Required: A Flexible Personnel Structure to Deliver Personal Opportunity Plans

Schools must provide adequate time allocations for all staff who support students' development and completion of POPs – POPs coaches and facilitators, data-entry clerks and tech specialists, scheduling coordinators, administrative assistants, teaching faculty, special education case managers, and the case management team. Launching POPs involves a wide range of tasks : collecting and disseminating data, preparing all professional learning sessions and materials related to POPs delivery, preparing all student materials related to POPs, scheduling POPs student sessions, and delivery of actual "real-time" POPs sessions with every student.

A POPs coach for every student

POPs become meaningful for students when personal and group conferencing about their current learning and future opportunities is at the heart of the POPs process. Without interactive dialogue, a POP becomes a hollow exercise. Students repeatedly cite the quality and quantity of personal conversations with counselors, advisors, and teachers as a major source of support and a major influence on their thinking about college and the future (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008). "At the very least students deserve the opportunity to talk seriously with adults – counselors, teachers, family members and others – who take a strong personal interest in their futures and have the time and skill to guide them through this period of decision and change" (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & DuPont, 2010).

An on-going relationship with the same adult (a POPs coach) during the school year is the crucial element in the POPs process. This role could be spread out across a combination of school counselors, graduation coaches, IEP case managers, other student support staff and specific faculty members with a reduced course load. Or every school staff member can serve as POPs coach for a cohort of 15 to 30 students. Some schools choose to partner with community-based organizations, including City Corps, which provide staff who serve as mentors/coaches for all students or students most at risk.

A POPs coach is a student's personal advocate and supportive guide who serves as the student's and family's primary contact and point person. A POPs coach is the adult who can say to a student, "I'm on your side and on your case" (Miller Lieber & Poliner, 2004). Few other activities communicate an adult's belief and confidence in a student as powerfully as one-to-one conversations in which responsive listening, thoughtful questions, and helpful feedback replace advice, judgment, and empty praise (Miller Lieber, 2009).

Considerations: A small number of school counselors and postsecondary specialists, by themselves, are unlikely to be able to provide the kind of regular "high-touch" contact that most students need throughout their planning process from year to year (Straus, 2013). Studies show that most high school students rarely have more than one conversation a year with a school counselor about their current learning experience or future aspirations (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & DuPont 2010). This means, regardless of the composition of POPs coaches, school administrators will need to negotiate reconfiguration of staff roles and responsibilities, and even teaching loads of current staff members in order to provide a personal POPs coach for every student.

POPs facilitators who deliver some POPs activities

A POPs facilitator can be any staff member who is charged with facilitating specific POPs activities that do not necessarily call for the adult involved to be the student's personal POPs coach. For example, counselors and postsecondary specialists might facilitate workshops for whole classrooms of students. After that, a POPs coach would engage in a follow-up conversation with a specific cohort of students. Technology teachers who are responsible for walking all students through computer-based career exploration and inventory activities provide another example of how faculty members can serve as POPs facilitators for specific POPs tasks.

A POPs coordinator for the POPs planning and assessment team

One member of the student support team needs to be the driver of the POPs initiative and serve as the coordinator of the POPs planning and assessment team. The POPs coordinator organizes and facilitates the work of the POPs team and serves as the "go-to" person about POPs with the administrative team, the student support team, and others who play a role in delivering POPs. This would likely be a half-time to full-time position depending on the size of the student population, the degree to which a college and career planning and preparation curriculum is already in place, whether a POPs delivery structure is tied to an advisory program, the degree to which student information systems are in place and easily retrievable, and the degree to which a solid case management team is operational.

An administrative co-chair for the POPs team

Identifying an administrator to serve as the POPs planning and assessment team co-chair is a judicious choice for several reasons. First, it communicates that this is a school priority and has the full support of the administrative cabinet. Second, the administrator serves as a conduit between the POPs team and the administrative cabinet to support a timely flow of information, feedback, and decisions. Finally and critically, the administrator co-chair serves in an oversight

capacity to monitor the development and implementation of the POPs initiative and supervise all staff who serve in a POPs capacity.

A POPs planning and assessment team who are responsible for designing, organizing, and assessing POPs

A POPs planning and assessment team (which should include counseling/student support staff, core academic teachers, a data specialist, and at least one person who would be entering and disseminating student information data) needs to drive the design process. The administrative cabinet and the POPs team will need to decide at what points the entire faculty should be involved in key decisions related to the organizational structure and schedule of POPs.

6. Formats, Activities, Documents, and Data that Drive the Personal Opportunity Plan Process

Formats

Formats for POPs delivery include a) interactive workshops or advisory sessions with groups of 15 to 30 students; b) personal conferences involving the student, her POPs coach, and sometimes the student's parent; c) independent work sessions with online POPs resources; d) presentations to an audience that might include the POPs coach, peers, family members, and other faculty and community members; e) quick check-ins between the student and his or her POPs coach; f) extended coaching and work sessions for students who need more time and support to complete major POPs benchmarks.

Activities

The ideal POPs process includes eight major types of activities delivered during the school year. The chart below outlines formats, major activity types, the people involved in each activity type, and a typical number of sessions and time frames for each activity type.

Format and Activities	Who's Involved?	How Often and When?
1. Interactive POPs workshops or advisory sessions that focus on year by year goal-setting, course selection and reflection; learning opportunity planning in and outside of school; development of a personal learner and leader profile; documentation and assessment of academic progress, "on-track" credit review and graduation status, college and career developmental readiness skills and mindsets	Individual student or cohort group with POPs coach and/or facilitator	At least four sessions scheduled during the school day
2. Personal conferences that involve review, goal reflection, and assessment of academic and testing data review; identification of learning, leadership, and youth development opportunities that match student's interests; middle to high school transition planning or high school to college and career planning	Student, her POPs coach, and parent/adult ally	At least two sessions scheduled during evenings or report card pick-up days
3A. Grades 6-10: Interactive POPs workshops, advisory	Individual student	At least four

sessions, and in-school and out-of-school events that focus on 1) self-exploration activities to develop students' ability to identify career interests, skills, and work values; 2) career exploration activities to develop students' ability to connect their interests, skills, and values to a range of career options, identify the school courses and employability skills needed to enter careers of interest, and identify corresponding post-secondary pathways (Nebraska Career Education, n.d.).	or cohort group with POPs coach and/or facilitator	sessions scheduled during the school day
3B. Grades 11-12: Interactive college and career planning and management activities that focus on 1) helping students develop a range of skills related to acquiring job and college search skills to make the right college-career match; 2) helping students complete all documents and meet all deadlines related to the college-going application and enrollment; 3) helping students develop the traits, work habits, and behaviors needed to navigate the transitions to new learning and employment settings (Miller Lieber, 2009).	Individual student or cohort group with POPs coach and/or facilitator	At least four sessions scheduled during the school day
4. Independent on-line college exploration and search, career development activities, and interest inventories to generate data for use in activities 1, 2, and 3	Group computer sessions with a POPs facilitator	At least two sessions scheduled during school day
5. "Straight talk" personal conference when a student is experiencing one or multiple sets of issues that are getting in the way of academic progress and personal well-being or a pre-intervention personal conference when students are experiencing academic, behavioral, or mental health challenges that require a re-set, a learning plan, and/or more intensive interventions	Individual with POPs coach	As needed
6. Quick check-ins and reminders related to submission of time-sensitive documents, projects, portfolios, etc.	Individual with POPs coach	As needed
7. Extended coaching and work sessions to ensure quality completion of planning documents, submissions and applications, and academic portfolios, benchmark, milestone, or exit requirements	Individual or small groups with a POPs coach or facilitator	As needed
8. Presentation and display of portfolios, capstone projects, defense of postsecondary plan, graduation exit benchmarks, internships, service learning projects, etc.	Student with POPs coach, family, peers, faculty, etc.	Scheduled to meet school requirements

A sample list of key POPs documents and data

Typical documents and data that need to be available to every student in order to engage in the POPs process (St. Lucie County School Board, n.d.):

- Learning, career, and personal development goals
- Student self-assessments and reflections
- Report cards, transcripts, and test scores
- Course selection forms and semester schedules
- Attendance and behavior data

- Academic and behavior intervention data (What? Why? When? Feedback, Results)
- School staff and family narratives and anecdotes
- Learning and career interest inventories and college and career exploration documents
- All postsecondary college and career planning documents, forms, applications, and check-lists
- On-going assessment of academic and developmental college and career readiness skills
- Youth development /leadership opportunities inside and outside of school and the traditional school year
- Recognitions, honors, awards

Optional documents and products that may be required by some districts and/or schools:

- Service learning logs
- Graduation exit requirements, course work portfolios, capstone projects, and other academic benchmarks and milestones

Why electronic documents, data, and portfolios are not sufficient

Most young people do not process and cannot recall data that is simply posted on a screen. This is particularly true for poor readers, slower cognitive processers, students with disabilities, and students at greatest risk. In fact, the majority of students just don't "get it" unless and until they see the data, process and talk about it, write it down, and actually use it in an applied activity. A case in point: Students rarely absorb what's actually on their transcripts if the documents are just handed to them to place in a folder or posted on the screen for quick viewing. It's only when students must record their credits and compute their GPAs for themselves that the import of credit accumulation and cumulative grades finally becomes real.

Relying only on electronic data creates another problem. In most schools, there are not enough computers available or enough band-width for hundreds of students to be on-line at the same time during a scheduled POPs session. Here's how a sample sequence of activities might incorporate a combination of electronic and paper data.

First, all students are scheduled to complete an interest-career inventory in an assigned computer lab during an assigned period sometime during a designated week.

Second, during this session, students either write down or print out hard copies of the career pathway information that is generated from the results of the inventory. This data gets placed in students' POPs folder within the POPs crate that belongs to the students' POPs coaches.

Third, during a follow-up POPs session with their coach, students use their career pathway data to engage in reflection activities and planning tasks related to the results of their interest-career inventory.

Considerations: The learning implications of exclusive dependence on electronic portfolios without a paper trail are simply not discussed! Schools have unthinkingly bought the promise of all things digital without having considered its effectiveness for different groups of students, for different purposes, and for different stages of learning mastery or remediation. In addition, schools may not have thought through the logistical and scheduling complications that emerge when everyone is dependent on electronic portfolios without a paper trail.

Building capacity and creativity to cull and disseminate the right documents and data

Culling, copying, and disseminating key data and documents for use in the POPs process sounds pretty straightforward. It isn't! Imagine, for a minute, an average Massachusetts high school of 800 students. Here are a few examples that illustrate the heavy lifting required.

- Students need copies of their transcripts within their hard-copy POPs files, so that they can continually use them to review where they stand and record information from transcripts on to POPs documents. Consider the logistics and person-power required to ensure that every student receives a cumulative transcript near the beginning of the school year and again after second semester begins.

- If a school is serious about expecting students to set academic goals every semester and assess their progress toward achieving these goals at mid-term and semester, the school will need to organize a process for students to receive hard copies of their mid-term report cards within a week of submission of mid-term grades and semester report cards within two weeks of final first semester grades.

- Since attendance is one the most robust predictors of school failure and dropping out, early intervention, even after just two or three absences, is absolutely critical. Thus, weekly attendance reports need to be in the hands of POPs coaches and their cohort of students. Consider the logistics and person power required to ensure that POPs coaches receive weekly attendance data every Monday morning.

Considerations: Since the POPs process directly serves students, schools might consider inviting students to help them think through creative ways to deliver and download data. What might be deliverable on a tablet, through email or a text message, on Google Docs, etc.?

Way before POPs are rolled out in a school, data clerks and specialists, administrative assistants, and the POPs coordinator need carry out a dry run to time out how long it takes to complete different data tasks: entering data, retrieving specific data reports, printing out information for each student; and sorting and disseminating data so that the right information gets to the right POPs coach. Working out the glitches beforehand will help make these tasks manageable.

Assume that data will need to be culled from different information banks

Very few schools have succeeded in creating a "one-stop shopping" student information system that accommodates all the data needed for the POPs process (Gartner Consulting, 2011). And even districts that have fairly sophisticated student information systems may need to make adjustments to their databases to accommodate more fields, drop boxes, and precisely worded categories.

Considerations: The data puzzle becomes an opportunity for districts and schools to get the smartest technologists in the same room to brainstorm ways to jerry-rig a set of databases that will enable schools to enter the right data on a daily or weekly basis, generate weekly summaries and reports necessary for good case management, and retrieve the right information needed for POPs coaches and students to engage in the POPs process.

7. Required: Scheduling Accommodations to Deliver Personal Opportunity Plan Sessions during the School Day

Schools must provide the right scheduling during the school day to ensure that every student and all staff who are supporting students' development of POPs can actually meet, talk, and plan at regularly scheduled points throughout the school year. There are really only a few scheduling scenarios that seem to work.

POPs advisory structure for grades 6-12

Given that most schools do not employ enough counselors to provide a "high touch" POPs experience for every student, some sort of advisory structure may be the most viable delivery option of POPs. All adults except a few members of the POPs planning and assessment team are advisors/ POPs coaches. On POPs/advisory days, the schedule is modified to accommodate a full period for POPs. Fifteen to twenty students and their POPs coach might meet once a week or several times a month in a schedule that is fairly scripted from one session to the next. Ideally, counselors and postsecondary specialists can rotate through POPs sessions to provide key information. (For a description of the features of effective advisory programs and some important considerations, see **15. Appendix: A Quick Advisory Tour**.)

Grade level seminar for high school

In this scenario, grade level seminars are scheduled weekly or up to 20 times throughout the year. POPs coaches are a combination of non-teaching student support staff and volunteer teachers who serve as POPs coaches in exchange for a reduced teaching load or elimination of other responsibilities. In a school of 1,000 students, for example, ten POPs coaches would serve about 200 to 250 seniors.

Other delivery structures

In some middle schools, grade level teams facilitate POPs activities in classes are extended during a designated period for 12 to 20 sessions a year. Each teacher on the team serves as a POPs coach for one group of students on the team. Some small high schools serving a majority of high needs students partner with a community-based organization who provide personal student advocates for all or some students and meet with students during the school day when they are not engaged in core academic classes.

Scheduling informal conferences and check-ins

POPs coaches schedule more informal individual or small group conferences before or after school, during lunch, or during a planning period with the hard and fast rule of not pulling students out of core academic classes. Here are some typical situations that prompt informal conferences.

Informal Conferences and Check-ins	For How Long?
Personal conference between individual student and POPs coach when student has failed two or more courses at mid-term	15 minutes
Personal conference between individual student and POPs coach to review career-postsecondary matches	15 minutes
Personal conference between individual student and POPs coach to talk through required interventions that student will need to complete in the next two weeks	15 minutes
Personal conference with a counselor when student is experiencing a high level of personal distress that is getting in the way of functioning in the classroom	No set time frame
Quick check in with POPs coach about meeting college submission deadlines	5 minutes
Quick check in between POPs coach and high risk student who needs daily doses of "high touch" attention and support to sustain improved attendance and performance	5 minutes
Personal conference between POPs coach and a student who is disengaged from any conversations about future aspirations	30 minutes

8. Required: Timely Communication between Personal Opportunity Plan Coaches and Early Intervention/Case Management Team

What is an early intervention/case management team?

The early intervention/case management team is charged with reviewing student data on a weekly basis to ensure that all students have equitable access to the timely delivery of services and interventions that they need (Stringfield, 2013). Typically, students who experience one or multiple academic, behavioral, or mental health challenges or family crises require what are called Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports and interventions (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009; OSEP Technical Assistance on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, n.d.).

How do case management team members link to POPs?

Members of the case management team who monitor and assess the status and progress of individual students would inform a POPs coach of any issues or events that have become barriers to a student's personal wellness and success at school. The early intervention/case management team member would also provide the POPs coach with a "heads-up" about action plans, interventions, or special programs that are being put in place for a student and share feedback about the progress of these interventions. Thus, a POPs coach is provided with

information that can inform her POPs conversations and personal check-ins with students in her cohort who are most at risk.

> **Considerations:** The key to making more intensive coaching for some students feel workable is equally distributing high needs students among POPs coaches, so that no POPs coach has more than a few students who need more intentional and frequent shepherding.

9. Required: Effective Professional Learning to Support Personal Opportunity Plans Implementation

Successful school-wide implementation of POPs requires ongoing and consistent professional learning for all staff involved in the POPs initiative. Changes in practice that require new competencies develop over time. Sustained adult learning involves collective participation of school faculty, aligns with other initiatives and goals of the school/district, engages teachers in "just in time" learning, and incorporates the content and materials they will use with students (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Ideally, the POPs planning and assessment team members provide professional development for POPs coaches and POPs facilitators. Professional development modules should be built on a culture of shared beliefs about the purposes of POPs; driven by the scope and sequence of the POPs curriculum; should support faculty cooperation and collegiality; incorporate facilitation, practice and rehearsal of ritualized protocols and specific activities; and include feedback systems to assess quality of professional learning, the fidelity of implementation, and the impact on student outcomes.

10. Required: Assessment and Accountability for Personal Opportunity Plans

A POPs initiative needs to be evaluated for effectiveness, just like any other component of the school's educational program. Monitoring progress of a change effort that involves so many structural and staffing shifts is a necessary task in order to maintain and sustain the initiative over the long haul. Assessment builds credibility and acceptance and helps the POPs planning and assessment team solicit input, check progress, dispel misinformation, and make informed adjustments along the way. Planning and assessment teams must first identify pivotal questions that they want to investigate in order to monitor POPs' effectiveness and plan for improvement.

Transparent student and staff accountability need to be in place to ensure that all students are completing their benchmark tasks at each grade level. In addition, many schools develop assessment and reflection tools that enable students to track their progress toward mastering developmental college and career readiness skills and mindsets. Finally, the impact and effectiveness of the total POPs initiative needs to be evaluated by students, staff, and parents through semi-annual surveys, feedback linked to specific experiences, and focus group interviews.

Baseline data should be reviewed every year to assess whether the POPs process impacts the improvement of the following student outcomes: attendance, grades, graduation and drop-out rates, and the percentage of students applying to and enrolling in postsecondary programs, Ideally students should be tracked through completion of degrees and certificates. Of particular importance is tracking improvements in student outcomes for the 30 percent of students most vulnerable to school failure and/or most likely to be disengaged in school or reluctant to even imagine, much less plan for, a future of their own making.

11. Everyone Has a Role in Supporting Personal Opportunity Plans

The role of the principal and the administrative cabinet

- Reconfiguring roles and responsibilities and/or adding personnel to ensure a POPs coach is assigned to every student
- Making faculty expectations, accountability, and evaluations around POPs responsibilities totally transparent
- Determining the delivery schedule for all POPs activities that is the best fit for the students, the school, and the faculty
- Ensuring that professional learning related to POPs is scheduled every year
- Providing stipends or release time for the POPs planning team in charge of designing and organizing POPs
- Serving as the school champions for POPs with students, parents, the student support staff, and faculty
- Driving the assessment and feedback protocols for evaluating POPs' effectiveness

The role of teachers

- Personalizing learning to meet the needs of different learners so that academic, social, and emotional support is proactive rather than reactive
- Assuming the role of first responder when students are struggling academically or behaviorally (Miller Lieber, 2011).
- Supporting students' acquisition of academic and developmental college and career readiness skills.
- Sharing information with a student's POPs coach when concerns and red flags arise.

Considerations: If the school is not transparently committed to personalized, student-centered learning and if teachers do not have opportunities to engage in professional learning that supports practices of personalization, the POPs process may not feel like a logical extension of what students are doing in the classroom.

The role of parents

"Meaningful conversations between a school staff member and parent hold the promise of raising parental expectations, strengthening parent beliefs in the value of schooling, and building parents' knowledge of the language of schooling and college and career planning and preparation that support high aspirations" (Hattie, 2009).

Schools tend to vastly underestimate the value and benefits of parent involvement in supporting students' academic progress, healthy development, and future aspirations. Here's what we know (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Patrikakou, 2004; Marzano, 2000):

- Parents are the single greatest influence on students' plans and future aspirations after high school.
- Parental expectations influence student achievement at every grade level.
- Schools can influence the degree to which parents are involved in their child's education and academic progress and achievement.
- Parents should be encouraged and invited to be directly involved in assessing their children's academic progress, their selection of courses and their choice of educational program.
- Teacher engagement with parents matters—a lot!
- Having one adult at school who serves as a primary contact with a parent during any given year supports strong school-student-family connections.
- If a parent is unable to function in a parental role at any given time, it is crucial that schools have a timely strategy to identify an adult ally who will serve as the student's adult advocate. This might be another family relative, an adult at school, a student's coach or work supervisor, or someone who has close connections with the student in the community.

Districts and schools need to design programs and opportunities that create a system-wide approach to helping students to, with their parents' support, make appropriate educational, personal development, and college and career plans.

The role of community partners

The larger community can support every student as they pursue their POPs by:

1. Providing "wrap-around" services for students and families most at risk (Public Citizens for Children and Youth, 2001; National Wraparound Initiative, 2010; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2013).
2. Providing partnerships with businesses, youth organizations, colleges, and other institutions to support students' exploration of college and career opportunities and place-based experiences in the work world.
3. Providing youth development and leadership opportunities to students that meet a broad range of needs and interests.

12: Options: Implementing Personal Opportunity Plans in Different Educational Settings

Although this paper aims to capture a fully realized iteration of POPs, every school is different and will customize a POPs initiative to reflect its profile and stage of readiness. School size, student composition, personnel resources and flexibility, union constraints, and a range of scheduling challenges may prevent some schools from creating a POPs initiative that provides the optimal level of attention and support desired for every student at every grade level.

What follows are more modest options; however, we present them with four caveats. For all of these options, while there may be savings with, for example, personal resources required, implementing POPs is only a little less complicated. Second, some options make sacrifices with regard to fairness and equity. Third, some options are likely to be less effective for students who would benefit most from a more personalized and saturated experience. Finally, some options will have a diminished impact on building a culture in which all staff members are invested in supporting every student to achieve his or her college and career goals.

1. Implement POPs for the 30 percent of students who are most at risk. Schools that don't have the capacity to support POPs for all students might choose a more limited implementation of POPs by developing a set of criteria to determine the 30 percent of students who would benefit the most from an intensive POPs process.

2. Reorganize the counseling-student support staff to provide all POPs-related activities, but in smaller doses. Some schools hire several clerical assistants in lieu of one counselor to free up all counselors and support staff to provide more direct services to students. In this schema, the student support staff is charged with implementing all POPs-related activities. They make regular visits to all students in classroom groups four to six times a year.

3. Configure a design for a fully realized POPs process for Freshmen and Seniors. Bookend a seminar or advisory structure for entering and exiting students, the pivotal planning years in high school.

4. Create an end-of-day period twice a week. In this schema, some students might have a POPs seminar on one day while other students are engaged in academic support and enrichment activities. Students reverse on the second day. Counselors and support staff might have schedules where they arrive later and leave later and faculty who volunteer could be offered stipends.

5. Institute homeroom for ten minutes a day with extended homeroom several times a month, and limit the scope of POPs. Ideally, homeroom is attached to 2nd or 3rd period classes to ensure that faculty teach their cohorts of POPs students. Pare down POPs to ritualized activities that focus only on academic check-ins and completion of post-secondary benchmarks.

13. A Short List of Big Decisions Linked to Personal Opportunity Plan Implementation

- Assess the degree to which the district or school has a strong, transparent, evidence-based commitment to a balanced set of goals and purposes for schooling and a personalized, student-centered education. If these commitments are weak, the school should stop, re-group and focus on implementing structural and curricular changes that will strengthen these commitments before considering the adoption of POPs.

- Decide how to make the case that POPs support the district and school's mission and desired student outcomes.

- Decide on the team who will help develop the POPs communication plan, introduce POPs to the school community, and roll-out the launch year of POPs for students, families, and staff.

- Decide who, specifically, will develop POPs documents, curriculum, and protocols at the district and/or school level.

- Decide how to reconfigure staff roles and responsibilities, add personnel, or pay stipends in order to provide:
    - a half-time to full-time equivalent position for a POPs/Advisory Coordinator
    - a POPs personal coach for every student
    - selected staff who will facilitate POPs group sessions

- Decide how the early intervention/case management team will communicate relevant information to POPs coaches.

- Decide how every teacher will be expected to support academic and developmental college and career readiness, career development, and postsecondary planning in the POPs process.

- Decide how the POPs process and POPs documents will be used in conjunction with students' IEPs (individual educational plans for students with disabilities).

- Decide on the ritualized schedule for POPs sessions for every student in every grade.

- Decide how students will be grouped and scheduled for POPs-facilitated clinics, workshops, and computer sessions.

- Decide when and how students and their POPs coaches will arrange for personal one-to-one and small group conferencing time.

- Decide on the strategies to be used to ensure that every student has a parent or an adult ally who is directly involved in the POPs process.

- Decide on the specific ritualized activities and events that involve parents in the POPs process.

- Decide when and how students will be scheduled for POPs conferences with their POPs coach and a parent or adult ally.

- Decide on the system for collection, copying, and distribution of student information data and documents that are used in the POPs process.

- Decide on the schedule for collection, copying, and distribution of student information data and documents that are used in the POPs process.

14. Conclusion

The research fields of college access and career and workforce development are awash with heartbreaking stories about too many students who make uninformed choices that derail their trajectories toward a good life and a promising future before they reach their desired destinations or even begin their journeys (Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2009). "Access without success is an empty promise and a missed opportunity with economic consequences" (*Time is money*, 2012).

Moreover, physicians, research scientists, and mental health practitioners are noticing an alarming rise in the numbers of children and young people who are failing to thrive and flourish in their communities (Commission on Children at Risk, 2012). The well-being of our next generation and the economic and social health of our nation are at risk when students are not supported to seek out and secure the opportunities that will empower them to own their futures.

Personal opportunity plans are not a cure-all for fixing what's wrong with the current regime of standards-based reform. However, personal opportunity plans can help close the gap between students' aspirations and the achievement of realistic but challenging goals that match their strengths, qualifications, and interests to the right postsecondary opportunities. This process has the power to inspire and transform the lives of young people.

Schools can do this. The development and implementation of personal opportunity plans can become a turning point moment for all school staff to make a collective commitment to support the healthy development and future aspirations of young people. It's messy and complicated and it demands tremendous planning and leadership.

But schools can do this. Our young people deserve no less than our best efforts to put personal opportunity plans in place for each and every student.

15. Appendix: A Quick Advisory Tour

After two decades of supporting advisory programs in secondary schools, we offer the following list of features and considerations that exemplify high quality and sustainable advisory programs.

- A mission-driven advisory that focuses on academic advisement, personal development, and college and career preparation (in other words, the POPs process) immediately elevates advisory from a "feel safe, feel good" space for adolescents to a critical structure that supports increased academic achievement, increased graduation rates, and increased college enrollment. These goals are hard to argue with. When teachers recognize that their work in advisory has a direct impact on school performance indicators, their commitment to become good advisors deepens over time.
- When the words "advisory" or "advisor" prompt immediate sighs of resistance and annoyance, planning teams get creative and name the structure and the person something else. For example, just changing the name of the adult role from "advisor" to "graduation

coach" (or any other phrase with the word "coach" in it) generally prompts a very positive response.

- When advisory includes rituals like Chicago Harper High School's weekly BAG check (monitoring behavior, attendance, and grades), the idea that advisory exists to support students' success in school is absolutely transparent. Problems are addressed openly and earlier, and students are engaged in a continual reflection on their goals and progress, a key developmental readiness skill linked to improved academic performance and increased effort and perseverance.

- While some advisory advocates discourage the isolation of forming special education advisory groups, we have found that the advisory period enables SPED case managers (who often have nearly full-time teaching responsibilities) to have a scheduled opportunity to meet with their SPED students on a regular basis (which would otherwise not exist).

- Ideally, advisors should teach the students whom they advise. In this configuration, students have a different advisor each year from grades six through ten who teaches them during that particular school year, and then an 11th and 12th grade advisor for two years who ideally teaches them at some point during junior or senior years. Many reasons prompt our recommendation of this grouping configuration. We find that when advisors actually teach students whom they advise, they get to know their students a lot sooner; moreover, their investment in their advisees' personal development, academic progress and college and career readiness increases exponentially.

  In one school with over 60 freshman advisories, teacher assessment of their advisory program shifted from a 70 percent negative rating to a 98 percent positive rating after reorganizing faculty so that they advised students whom they taught.[53]

  We also found that when urban schools designed advisory groupings in which the same teacher works with the same student cohort over four years, this goal rarely materialized. Teacher attrition and unstable student populations from year to year and grade to grade resulted in very few students actually remaining with the same cohort of students or with the same advisor through all four years.

- When advisors serve as a grade specific advisory "specialist," they get very good at what they do. Teachers who volunteer to be ninth grade advisors, for example, tend to really like freshmen, resonate with the developmental needs of younger students, and love serving as their welcoming guide for all things high school. Other teachers find that they are a better match for older students and willingly take on more intensive college and career advisement responsibilities.

16. Appendix: Further Reading for Educators Considering the Adoption of POPs

This report draws heavily from many publications and documents, including the resources cited below. These are strongly recommended for educators considering the adoption of POPs.

For a full list, see **17. References.**

1. National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth

   http://www.ncwd-youth.info

   A partnership between the Institute for Educational Leadership, Office of Disability and Employment Policy, and Boston University, this is the "go-to" place for the intersection between learning plans, personalized, student-centered education, college and career exploration and planning, and specific support for youth with disabilities. The resources are relevant and applicable for all adolescents. Among the more stellar resources that can be downloaded on the website are:

   • Fact Sheet: Individualized Learning Plans - http://www.ncwd-youth.info/fact-sheet/individualized-learning-plan
   • ILPs How-to Guide - http://www.ncwd-youth.info/ilp/how-to-guide

2. ILP Framework
   http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-PLP_ILP_Framework.pdf

   This six page framework from the state of Rhode Island uses straightforward language and explanations that help walk students, families, and staff through the nuts and bolts of ILPs, including purpose, roles and responsibilities, protocol and logistics, and a glossary of ILP-related concepts and terms.

3. Public Agenda (2010). *Can I Get a Little Advice Here? How an Overstretched High School Guidance System is Undermining Students' College Aspirations.* Retrieved from http://www.publicagenda.org/files/can-i-get-a-little-advice-here.pdf

4. Wolfe, R.E., Steinberg, A., Hoffman, N. (2013). *Anytime, anywhere.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press.
   This book provides rich examples from schools across the country that showcase student-centered instructional and learning practices.

5. Halpern, R. (2012). *It takes a whole society: Opening up the learning landscape in the high school years.* Retrieved from Nellie Mae Foundation website: http://www.nmefoundation.org/

6. Smith, K. N., Shea, M. M. (2013). *Expanding minds and opportunities: Leveraging the power of afterschool and summer learning for student success.* Retrieved from http://www.kitonline.org/pdfs/ExpandingMindsAndOpportunities2013.pdf

This report is excerpted from the book of the same name, edited by Terry K. Peterson, and presents research and best practices that inform high quality youth development opportunities. Helping students to seek out and engage in a saturation of youth development opportunities is often a neglected component of the POPs process. Yet, for many students, these kinds of experiences create the most authentic and powerful platform on which to develop their potential strengths, passions, and career aspirations.

7. Farrington, C., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T. S., Johnson, D. W., Beechum, N.O. (2012). *Teaching adolescents to become learners: The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance.* Retrieved from the Consortium on Chicago School Research website:
https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Noncognitive%20Report.pdf

8. Nebraska Career Education (n.d.).Goal setting guide and personal learning plan. Retrieved from www.education.ne.gov/CARED/PDFs/GSG2010.pdf
This is a thoughtful example of a small booklet that jump-starts goal setting and career planning for students.

9. Miller Lieber, C. (2009). *Increasing college access through school-based models of postsecondary preparation, planning, and support.* Cambridge, MA: Educators for Social Responsibility. Retrieved from Educators for Social Responsibility's website:
http://esrnational.org/resources/increasing-college-access/
This publication offers a sample grade-by-grade rubric of academic planning and postsecondary exploration and preparation activities.

10. OSEP Technical Assistance on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. (n.d.). *Wrap-around service and positive behavior support.* Retrieved from www. pbis. org/school/tertiary_level/wraparound. aspx

11. Connecticut State Department of Education. (2013). *Wraparound services and closing the achievement gap* [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from
http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/pressroom/state_board_of_education_takes_action_071613.pdf
This two-page fact sheet offers a good description and explanation of wraparound services and provides an excellent resource list for learning more.

17. References

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