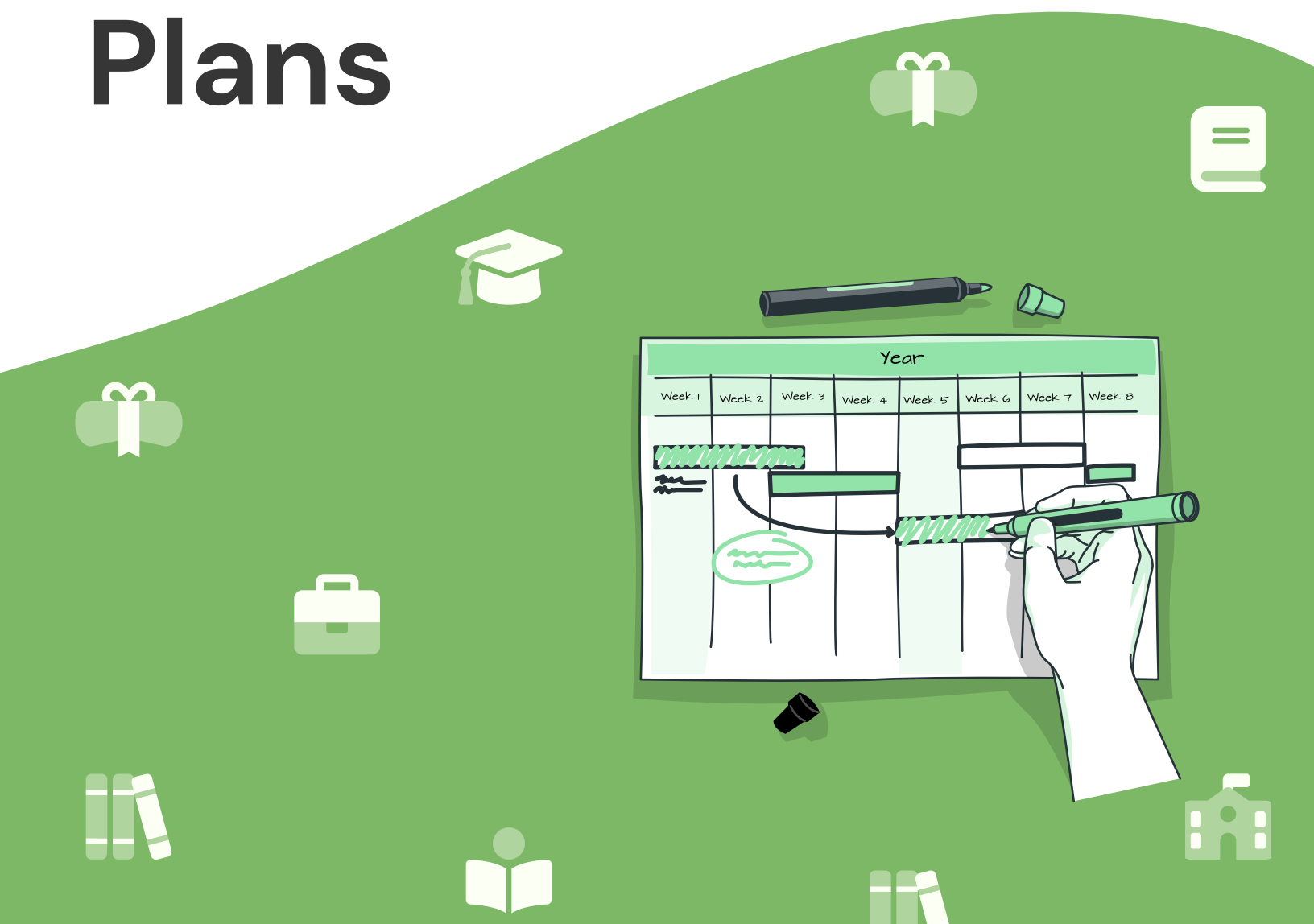


# Creating Personalized College and Career Plans



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# What Are Personalized CCR Plans?

One of the primary objectives of schools is to ensure that students are prepared to lead a productive and fulfilling life beyond high school. The manifestation of this will be different for each student as each individual brings a unique profile of experience, interests, talents, challenges, hopes, and dreams. To ensure that schools are able to make this a reality, it is vital that each student has time, structure, and support to learn about potential post-secondary opportunities, engage in introspection around what they might like to do, articulate their goals, reflect on ambitions as they grow and change, and understand the steps to achieve their desired outcomes.

In order to create the framework for this endeavor, schools can ensure that there is a clear and cohesive process for each secondary student to develop a personalized college and career readiness (CCR) plan. These personalized CCR plans should begin early in a student's high school career and guide students on meaningful goal setting, facilitate planning with tangible and actionable steps to achieve those goals, provide opportunities for regular check-ins and reflection, and include collaboration with families, counselors, and other relevant stakeholders.

## **Use this toolkit to learn more about:**

- Benefits personalized CCR plans have for students, families, counselors, and other stakeholders.
- Best practices for creating personalized CCR plans.
- Steps to create a system for each student to meaningfully engage in CCR planning.
- Strategies for reflecting on and deepening the impact of current CCR practices.

# Benefits of Personalized College and Career Plans for Different Stakeholder Groups

## Students

Personalized college and career plans ensure that students are making thoughtful and intentional choices about their learning—from coursework to internships to volunteer opportunities—and that they have a clear and actionable path for their specific goals. These personalized plans help students understand how their choices within high school align to their futures and nurtures a sense of meaning and purpose in their efforts. When students understand what they are working toward, they are more motivated to persevere through challenges.

With personalized plans, students can be strategic about their course choices, employment and internship opportunities, extracurricular activities, and volunteer hours, allowing them to maximize their time and efforts. And, when these decisions are closely aligned to student goals, students are much more likely to make choices that fit best with their pathway, rather than choosing to be with friends or a preferred time schedule.

## Families

Personalized college and career plans make it much easier to share input, support, and collaborate with their child in a more objective and productive manner. With documented and thoughtful personalized plans, conversations and planning around post-secondary steps can be based on something tangible and concrete. Articulated plans promote better planning and can prevent family crises during senior year. This proactive approach empowers families to better prepare for and support a student's post-secondary journey across the financial, experiential, and emotional realms.

## Counselor

Personalized college and career plans create a systematic way to ensure that their students are setting goals, articulating the path to meet those goals, and to track the progress of each individual along the way. By starting these plans early in a student's high school trajectory, counselors are able to frame the decision points within high school as working toward a particular outcome and in a way that is personalized to each student's pathway and future.

When these plans are well documented and regularly updated, it helps counselors to check whether students are on track and intervene when necessary. With this approach, counselors are able to provide more personalized support across their caseload of students. Further, by having a well-thought-out system in place for creating and revisiting these plans, schools are able to provide a more equitable experience for students and ensure that all students have access to the same resources and information.

## Administrators

For administrators at the building and district level, personalized college and career plans can offer a tangible way to track student progress on college and career readiness goals, rather than having to wait for graduation rates and post-secondary success metrics to evaluate current programs and processes. These plans create documentation of student goals and actions around interim steps to meet those goals. Using a systematic approach, administrators can see school-level and district-level trends and patterns that can help identify barriers to student success, spotlight promising practices, and inform needs for intervention and future planning.

# Best Practices to Guide Design & Practice of Personalized College and Career Plans



## BEST PRACTICES

### Student-Centered

In order for personalized college and career plans to be meaningful and worthwhile, it is critical that the content is truly driven by the individual student. Though these plans should include guidance and feedback from counselors, teachers, guardians, and even peers, the core of it must reflect the student's hopes, dreams, goals, interests, strengths, and challenges as they are the ones who will live with the outcomes of this planning. By having the student be the driver of the plan and the longer-term goal, they are more engaged and committed to the steps along the way.

### Clearly Articulated & Documented

Strong personalized college and career learning plans require students to clearly articulate post-secondary goals and the action steps required to achieve them. The process of explicitly recording a goal forces students to be more thoughtful and specific than they are likely to be in verbal conversations alone. And, it naturally encourages students to define their goals within the appropriate bounds—neither too narrow nor too broad. The formal documentation of the plan allows students to revisit and reflect on their development and their goals, and provides opportunities for counselors and families to monitor growth and provide feedback to students. And, this allows counselors to track progress based on tangible metrics and use this data to inform future decision-making for students.



## BEST PRACTICES

### Early & Foundational

With only four years in high school, each semester and school year are a critical part of the overall student experience. Many courses, programs, and opportunities available later in high school are dependent upon prerequisites and sequences of courses and experiences. Because of this, it is vital that the setting of goals and the creation of personalized college and career plans begin early freshman year or in middle school so that the choices students make allow for the goal they have set.

### Iterative, Reflective, & Collaborative

Students grow and change over the course of their four years of high school. Ensuring that students have opportunities to reflect to either reinforce their articulated plans and goals or adapt and shift them based on learned experiences allows the plans to remain relevant and meaningful. Schools should build in regular opportunities for students to revisit their plans each semester, preferably prior to course selection for the coming term, and use insights from these reflections to inform future decision-making. To heighten the impact of these plans, it is also best practice to use these check-in points to facilitate feedback and collaboration with school counselors, teachers, and parents or guardians for support and guidance.



## BEST PRACTICES

### Tied to Real-Word Application

Personalized college and career learning plans should include components that allow students to get first-hand experience with some element of their articulated goal. From internships, to job shadowing, to volunteer opportunities, to virtual tours, to conversations with mentors, ensuring students have opportunities to try out what they think they want is a critical component to ensuring the goal is a good match for the student. Sometimes what students imagine they might like does not hold true in practice. These experiences can also broaden students' understanding of what is possible or available within a given field. Additionally, personalized plans should include steps and expectations for the financial costs of college or training as well as the likelihood of making a living wage given specific educational and career choices. These financial components can prove to be a major barrier to postsecondary success; addressing them early in alignment with goals is essential.








# Checklists for Implementation of Personalized CCR Plans



## CHECKLIST

# School-Wide: Planning and Establishing Processes






To begin the process of having students create personalized college and career plans, it is critical for schools to be thoughtful and strategic about the overall structure, timeline, and rollout.

-  Establish a system for how students will document their personalized college and career plans and how counselors and other stakeholders will view, track progress, and provide feedback.
-  Take an inventory of current practices and resources the school or district utilize that might support or guide this process.
-  Align action steps with the school calendar, including semester breaks and external testing dates, to ensure proper sequencing and timing.
-  Determine with whom and when during a student's day they will create and engage with the college and career readiness planning process. You might consider: Will students do this during an advisory period? Will counselors or other trained educators or advisors lead the process?
-  Communicate the purpose and details of this process to all relevant stakeholders including school staff, students, and families.




## CHECKLIST

# Freshman Year

### First semester

-  Prior to Freshman year, consider hosting an orientation where students learn about extracurricular activities, CTE opportunities, and other programs unique to the school.
-  Introduce students to the platform or process for creating their college and career plan. Include a preview of activities and experiences they will engage in throughout the year and across high school so they understand the overall process.
-  Have students complete a personality or strengths inventory to give them external sources to inform their goal-setting and planning. Provide guidance around how students should use the information from these activities.
-  Review graduation requirements (including typical college acceptance and NCAA requirements), potential opportunities for higher-level courses that require prerequisites, and how GPAs are calculated and the importance of maintaining certain GPAs for access to future opportunities.
-  Have students go through a goal-setting process and document their college and career goals. With guidance from counselors, teachers, and peer mentors, have students record action steps necessary to achieve those goals. Have students share their plans with family members for feedback.





### Second semester

-  Begin to acclimate students with internship opportunities, college search resources, and scholarship information.
-  Review data and check in with at-risk students to help identify students who may be struggling socially and emotionally or off track to graduate on time. Connect students to mental health, credit recovery, or other relevant services if needed.
-  Prior to course selection for sophomore year, have students review their college and career plan, make adjustments as needed, and use the plan to inform decision-making for the following year.





## CHECKLIST

# Sophomore Year

### First semester

-  Early in the year, have students meet with a counselor or advisory group to review college and career plans. Have them consider whether their goals and action plans still reflect their hopes and ambitions. Have them identify and document any additional steps to improve their CCR readiness in the coming months.
-  Have students review graduation requirements, future dual enrollment or college-level courses, and corresponding prerequisites, and ensure that their college and career plans take these choices into account.
-  Review data and check in with at-risk students to help identify those who may be struggling socially and emotionally or off track to graduate on time. Connect students to mental health, credit recovery, or other relevant services if needed.
-  Discuss testing dates and test preparation resources with students and build in opportunities to review test scores once students receive them.





### Second semester

-  Communicate with guardians about the college search and application process, including the financial components. You might include describing the value of internships or other real-world learning opportunities so students can learn more about whether their goal is a good fit. Find ways to invite guardians to share any questions or concerns they might have.
-  Talk with students about how to search for relevant scholarships and have them take note of any additional requirements such as volunteer hours or extracurricular involvement.
-  Have students brainstorm possible internship opportunities that align with their articulated college and career goals. Provide resources for them to search for internship opportunities or connect with relevant professionals in the area.
-  Prior to course selection for junior year, have students review their college and career plan, make adjustments as needed, and use the plan to inform decision-making for the following year. Have students set up a tentative schedule for the next two years that includes higher-level courses, career pathway coursework, appropriate tests, volunteer opportunities, and internships or other real-world learning experiences.






## CHECKLIST

# Junior Year

### First semester

-  Have students meet with a counselor or advisory group to review college and career plans. It is important for students, counselors, and guardians to do a deep review of whether students are on track to meet their goals, including graduation requirements, and if any adaptations or interventions are needed to get them on track.
-  Discuss testing dates and test preparation resources with students and include opportunities to review their test scores. Ensure students understand opportunities to retake tests and how to make decisions around doing so.
-  Support students in creating a resumé of activities, experiences, skills, and achievements that they can utilize in college, scholarship, and/or job application processes.
-  Ensure students are aware of upper-level coursework, internships, or other career-specific programs in which they are eligible for. Help them understand how these courses or programs align with their college & career plans and how to include them in their schedules.





### Second semester

-  Host educational sessions for students and families to walk through the college application, financial aid, and scholarship search processes. Assume families have no prior experience and help them understand the steps they must take and deadlines to do so. Provide multiple modes of communication across families' home languages and follow up as needed.
-  Facilitate conversations with older students who have followed similar paths to share lessons learned and other details of their experiences.
-  Check in with at-risk students and reach out to teachers to identify students who may be struggling socially and emotionally. Connect students to mental health or other services.
-  Closely review data, records, and transcripts for students who may not be on track to graduate on time. Connect students with credit recovery opportunities and make a detailed action plan with them and their families. Include specific plans for future follow up.
-  Prior to course selection for senior year, have students review their college and career plan, make adjustments as needed, and use the plan to inform decision-making for the following year. Have students review their schedule for the next year to ensure they are maximizing opportunities for learning and experience during their senior year.





## CHECKLIST

# Senior Year

### First semester

-  Early in the year, have students meet with a counselor or advisory group to review college & career plans. It is important for students, counselors, and guardians to do a deep review of whether students are on track to meet their goals, including graduation requirements, and what, if any, interventions are needed to get them on track to graduate on time.
-  Host educational sessions for students and families to walk through the college application, financial aid (including FAFSA), and scholarship processes and share resources to support these efforts. Assume families have no prior experience and help them to understand the steps they must take and the deadlines to do so. Provide multiple modes of communication across families' home languages and follow up as needed.
-  Create opportunities to support students as they write essays for college and scholarship applications and review their resumés and other application materials. This might take place in advisory periods or coordinated with English or CTE courses.
-  Discuss testing dates and test preparation resources with students and build in opportunities to review test scores once students receive them and dates for submitting scores to colleges, training programs, or scholarship committees. Ensure students understand opportunities to retake tests and how to make decisions around doing so.

### Second semester

-  Track FAFSA completion and follow up with students and families as needed. This may require direct outreach as the year goes on for families who are struggling with the process.
-  Work with students to go over graduation requirements, make sure they are on track for graduation, sign their name for diploma accuracy, and discuss graduation logistics including the rental of the cap and gown.
-  For students who are at-risk for not graduating, connect them with credit recovery opportunities and make a detailed action plan with them and their families, including steps to graduation and beyond.
-  Reflect with students on the steps they have taken to realize their postsecondary goals and celebrate their hard work, success, and achievements. For students who might be at risk for summer melt, consider connecting them with resources to help them follow through to matriculation in the fall.

# Strategies to Deepen Practices



## **STRATEGIES**

For schools and districts that have already implemented personalized college and career plans, there are practices that can help enrich the experience and impact for students and families. Consider building these strategies into current plans:



### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT REFLECTION**

When students are setting goals, making course selections, or choosing a particular pathway, embed questions for reflection that encourage them to consider why they are making these choices and how these decisions map onto broader goals and plans.



### **STUDENT MENTORS**

Student mentors can be a great resource to help students as they are making their personalized college and career plans and can offer first-hand advice and perspectives. These mentors can also provide a sounding board for students that feels less formal than conversations with counselors or guardians. Consider creating a student mentor program that includes dedicated and structured time for mentoring sessions with guided conversations and topics.



### **ENGAGING FAMILIES**

Families can add tremendous value to the college and career planning process. And, many families are unfamiliar with the nuances and steps required throughout high school. Consider finding ways—both synchronously and asynchronously—to bring families into conversations about these personalized college and career readiness plans. If possible, allow them to view the plans digitally and provide constructive feedback or ask questions. Host sessions to guide conversations between students and their families and to facilitate answering any questions they might have about available resources or the overall process.



### **ALUMNI CONNECTIONS**

Recent alumni can provide invaluable advice and networking opportunities for current students. When students graduate, find a way to connect them to a school alumni network so they can remain in contact with the school community. Consider hosting events where alumni share lessons learned or establish a database to connect students with alumni in similar fields.

## STRATEGIES



### PROGRAM EVALUATION

Regularly evaluating programs and practices allows schools to ensure that they are meeting the evolving needs of their students. To promote equitable access, consider tracking participation in different pathways and programs from year to year. Ask questions to ensure that the gender, racial, and socioeconomic makeup of specialized programs is reflective of the overall student body. Consider finding ways to get the feedback of graduating seniors or alumni who can share lessons learned, information on what worked well for them, and guidance on what could be adapted or refined to better set them up for success.





# Turning Student Dreams into Actionable Plans

