

## **State Plans for Implementing Programs of Study**

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### **Abstract**

*This article examines how the states plan to implement the Programs of Study (POS) that were mandated by the 2006 reauthorization of the federal legislation for career and technical education. A coding system was developed for summarizing the methods described in the plans of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. The POS will primarily be implemented through modification and expansion of existing delivery methods. In two-thirds of the 53 plans, local districts will have the primary responsibility for developing POS using criteria and templates provided by the states. All states will approve local plans and provide technical assistance and professional development.*

Federal legislation addresses issues about which a Congressional consensus emerges concerning the gap between current conditions and more desirable future conditions. Once such a gap has been identified, the legislation specifies actions that available evidence suggests may have an impact on these problems (McDonnell & Grubb, 1991). Among the issues addressed in the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-270, Perkins IV) are concerns about the transition of career-technical students from high school to postsecondary education. The legitimacy of these concerns is supported by the evidence on transition examined elsewhere in this issue. The elements of Programs of Study (POS) specified in Perkins IV reflected current thinking among educators concerning practices that assist students to make a successful transition (Bangser, 2008). These include the alignment of secondary and postsecondary instruction, high standards and expectations, and integration of academics with career-focused classes.

Once legislation is passed in a federal, highly decentralized educational system, how is it implemented at the state and local levels? Since the establishment of the Federal Board for Vocational Education by the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, the state plan has been the primary means for translating federal policy into state and local actions. The state plan is essentially a contract between a state and the federal government. In the plan, the state describes how it will work with its local districts to implement the activities required or authorized by legislation, and how it will evaluate the degree to which these activities are achieving the objectives of the

legislation. For this paper, state plans were examined to determine how the requirement for POS in Perkins IV will be translated into action taken by the states and local districts. The approaches that states have described in their plans are summarized and compared to results from a prior survey that collected data on these approaches. Further, the results are compared to a prior survey that collected data on these approaches.

### **Methodology**

When Perkins IV was passed, states were given the option of submitting a one-year transition plan followed by a 5-year or a 6-year plan describing how they would implement the new legislation. By April 1, 2008, all states were required to have submitted their plans. The sections of the plans relevant to POS for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands were obtained from the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), U.S. Department of Education. In the following discussion, all references to “states” include these jurisdictions.

All state plans were written following the directions in the “Guide for Submission of State Plans,” which had been issued in 2007 by OVAE. This guide instructed the states to describe how they and their eligible recipients of Perkins funds will develop and implement POS. The guide repeated the language of Perkins IV regarding the components that POS must include: (a) secondary and postsecondary elements; (b) coherent and rigorous content, aligned with challenging academic standards, and relevant career and technical content; (c) opportunity for secondary education students to participate in dual or concurrent enrollment programs or other ways to acquire postsecondary education credits; and (d) outcomes consisting of industry-recognized credentials or postsecondary level certificates, or associate or baccalaureate degrees. The guide also required the states to describe how they will support eligible recipients in developing and implementing articulation agreements between secondary education and postsecondary education institutions, and make information about POS available to secondary students and their parents.

A coding system was developed to summarize the manner in which the states responded to these instructions. To develop the initial code, five states that vary in size and the emphasis they place on secondary level career and technical education (CTE) were selected: Maine, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas. The relevant sections of the plans from these states were reviewed and codes were developed to classify the responses to the instructions issued by OVAE. Two coders who had not been involved in the development of the coding system separately applied it to nine states. Questions that arose were resolved by adding additional codes and deleting those that were not clear. When agreement had been reached on the final version of the coding system, the codes assigned independently by the two coders were compared. Identical codes were assigned for 94.8% of the total codes. Almost all

disagreements involved the codes that had been developed to classify strategies for implementing POS and methods for disseminating information about them.

When the system was found to be reliable, one person coded the remaining 44 states and created a file that contained the language from the state plans that discussed strategies for implementation of POS and methods for informing students and parents about POS. These strategies and methods were reviewed by a third coder to determine if they supported the codes that had been assigned. The third coder disagreed on 20 of a total of 522 codes for an agreement rate of 96.2%. Where there was disagreement, the codes applied by the final coder were used in the analysis. The following plan excerpt is an example of a disagreement from the Connecticut state plan with regard to a strategy for implementing POS. The plan reads as follows:

In Connecticut's Career Pathways Initiative, Connecticut will no longer offer a separate Tech Prep grant opportunity. Instead, funds once awarded separately to implement secondary/postsecondary transition strategies and articulation processes will become part of the basic secondary and postsecondary grants and will be referred to as College Career Pathways...During the transition year, the grant was utilized to support professional development activities designed to strengthen secondary/postsecondary partnerships and develop and implement articulation agreements that support seamless career pathways between high school and postsecondary educational opportunities. (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008, p. 18)

The first coder applied code 4, statewide articulation agreements. The final coder saw no reference to statewide agreements and changed this to code 3, continue/expand existing career pathways/Tech Prep. The results that emerged from this coding are presented. These data allowed inferences about whether the states or local districts will have the primary responsibility for the development of POS, the strategies to be followed for implementation, and the methods that will be used to inform stakeholders about the POS that local districts offer.

## **Results**

### **Implementing Programs of Study**

The coding of the state plans indicates that in two-thirds (66%) of the 53 states, local districts will have the primary responsibility for developing POS. In 15 states, the state office responsible for CTE will have the primary responsibility, and in 3 states, there was not sufficient information in their plans to make a judgment. State-developed POS are typically described as core content that must be delivered, with local education agencies having the discretion to add material appropriate for local circumstances. An agricultural-based POS, for example, might be quite different if it was to be offered in an urban or rural area.

The development of the coding system identified four primary strategies that states were planning for implementation of POS. In addition to these strategies, all

states plan to approve local plans for POS and provide professional development and technical assistance in their development and implementation. The four strategies that vary across states and an “other” category were used to code the 53 state plans. The percentages of states that will use these strategies are presented in Figure 1. Providing criteria, templates, models, and frameworks for local districts to use is, by a large margin, the most frequent. Of the 35 states where local districts will have the primary responsibility for developing POS, 31 proposed providing criteria/templates for local districts to use as one of their strategies.

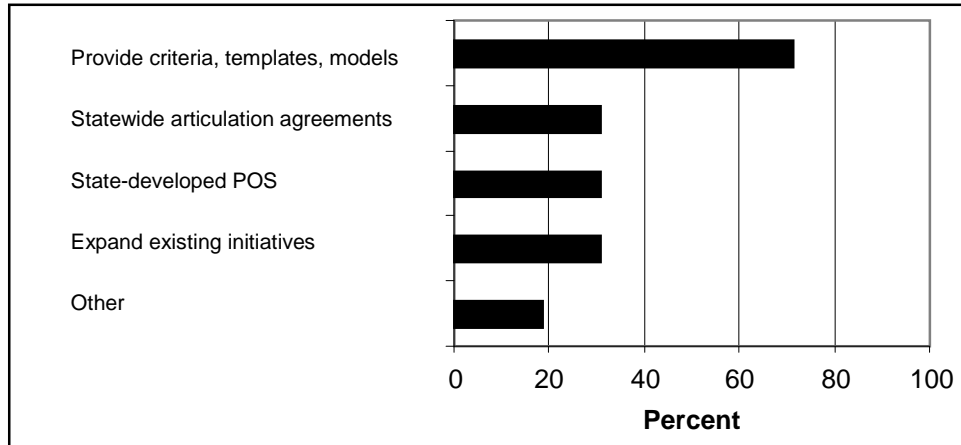


Figure 1. Strategies Identified in State Plans for Implementing Programs of Study

Note. The percentages are based on 49 states' plans. No strategies beyond approval of local plans, technical assistance, and professional development could be identified in four states. The sum of the percentages exceeds 100% because an average of 1.82 strategies was coded for each state plan.

Statewide articulation agreements enable students who have earned postsecondary credit while in high school to be awarded those credits by any postsecondary institutions in their states that have entered into the agreements. Such agreements were coded if a plan indicated that the state either had such agreements or was actively working to develop them. Even with this rather liberal criterion, a little less than one-third (31%) of the state plans referred to statewide articulation. The identical percentage referred to expanding or strengthening existing Tech Prep consortia. In Michigan, for example, the Tech Prep consortia areas are aligned with the 25 Michigan Works Agencies that implement federal Workforce Investment Act programs to facilitate increased coordination of efforts.

A sampling of the strategies coded in the Other category includes: (a) Iowa and South Dakota will strengthen transition from two-year to four-year postsecondary institutions, (b) California intends to identify exemplary locally developed POS and disseminate information about them, (c) Maine will require each eligible recipient of Perkins funds at the secondary and postsecondary levels to designate a position that will be responsible for facilitating, documenting, monitoring, and reporting on articulation agreements, (d) Arizona will establish a statewide POS that leads to an associate degree that will be accepted by the three state universities as the first two years for a bachelor's program, and (e) Nebraska plans a statewide consortium to provide leadership and direction for the alignment of secondary/postsecondary curriculum, development of statewide articulation agreements, and expansion of dual credit opportunities.

Of the 53 plans examined, three-fourths (40) described using career clusters as the basis for organizing their POS. Twenty-two made specific references to the 16 career clusters that have been adopted by OVAE,<sup>1</sup> and the remaining 18 referred to other clusters. It appeared that some of these were just a different grouping of the 16. If the plan referred to career clusters, but did not explicitly cite the 16, the state was coded as using a different set. Eight states indicated that they planned to use the career pathways that have been developed by the Career College Transitions Initiative in developing their POS. In 13 states, no reference to career clusters was found.

Only 15 of the state plans specified the grades to be included in the POS. The narrowest range was found in Minnesota, grades 11 to 14, the last two years of high school and the first two years of postsecondary education. The Minnesota plan encourages but does not require a wider range. Nine states specified or encouraged POS that start below grade 11 and extended to 14, and five more extended the upper grade to 16, a bachelor's degree.

Twenty-eight of the state plans specified that one POS must be offered by each recipient of Perkins funds during the first year of the plan, and Arkansas and Texas required three. The other 23 plans that were reviewed did not address the number to be offered. Of the 28 requiring one POS in the first year, 7 specified higher numbers in subsequent years, and 4 anticipate, but did not specify, higher numbers. Connecticut, Ohio, and the Virgin Islands set a goal of eventually delivering all CTE through POS. The language regarding this goal from these plans includes:

*Connecticut:* Key to Connecticut's 2008-13 Five-Year State Plan is the ongoing development and implementation of the Career Pathways Initiative and the continued adoption of the Student Success Plan (Programs of Study)

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<sup>1</sup> The article "Effectiveness of Previous Initiatives Similar to Programs of Study: Tech Prep, Career Pathways, and Youth Apprenticeships" in this issue discusses the emergence of the 16 career clusters as the primary way of organizing CTE programs.

model for every Connecticut CTE student. (Connecticut Department of Education, 2008, p. 13)

*Ohio:* The State will develop a phase-in plan that will ensure that existing programs transition to POS and that 100 percent of State-approved secondary career-technical education (CTE) programs have a State-approved Program of Study in FY2014. Postsecondary recipients will be required to develop/review/revise POS in collaboration with their secondary partner(s) following the same schedule as the secondary recipient. (Ohio Department of Education, 2008, pp. 15-16)

*Virgin Islands:* Through the local application process, eligible recipients will be required to implement programs of study that are aligned with the Career Clusters for at least 25% of all CTE programs offered each year of Perkins IV resulting in 100% implementation of all CTE programs by 2012-13. (Virgin Islands Department of Education, 2008, p. 27)

### **Providing Information about Programs of Study**

Perkins IV requires recipients of its funds to describe how they will make information available regarding the POS they will offer. All but one of the 53 plans that were reviewed described one or more methods of providing such information. Figure 2 shows that all but one of the states will rely on channels that are currently in place. These existing channels include student handbooks, course catalogs, newsletters, publications, and program listing on state websites. The following paragraph from the Iowa plan is similar to the descriptions of the methods to be used in many states:

Information about programs of study at the secondary level will be disseminated using diverse methods, resources and media. IDE [Iowa Department of Education] career and technical education consultants provide technical assistance to eligible recipients concerning technical knowledge and skills as well as infused academic and career skills and knowledge. Professional development opportunities, utilizing the Iowa Professional Development Model (IPDM) for eligible recipients, will be conducted to provide information on effective practices for integrated career and technical education programs.

Examples of resources include Iowa Choices (Iowa's Career Information Delivery System), electronic bulletins and updates, student course handbooks, secondary school curriculum guides, community college handbooks, and publications such as Iowa's Community College Program Guide as well as the Iowa Career Resource Guide. (Iowa Department of Education, 2008, p.17)

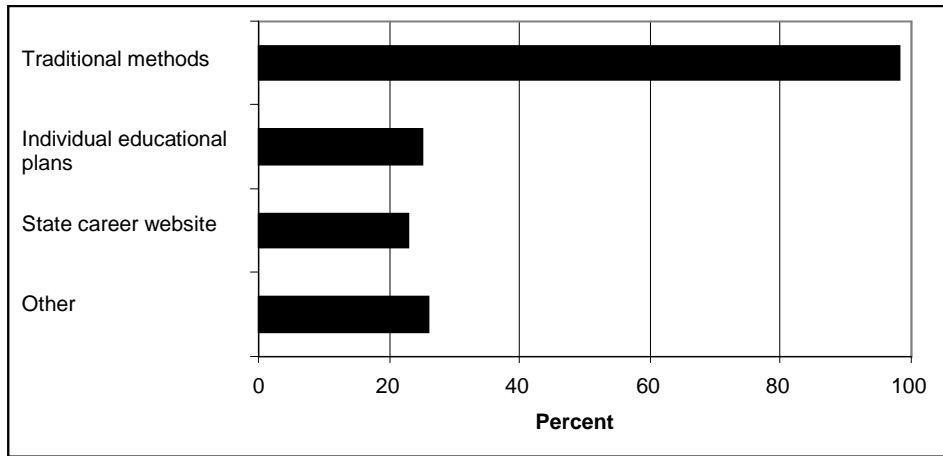


Figure 2. Methods described in state plans for informing secondary students and parents about Programs of Study.

Note. The percentages are based on 52 states. No methods of disseminating information could be identified in one state. The sum of the percentages exceeds 100% because an average of 1.73 methods was coded for each state plan.

Thirteen states included information about POS as part of the development of individualized educational plans. These individualized plans have various labels including Career Action Plan (Arkansas), Student Success Plan (Connecticut), Student Core Curriculum Plan (Iowa), Graduation Plan (Indiana, South Carolina, and Wyoming), Next Step Plan (New Mexico), and Student Education Occupation Plan (Utah). Twelve state plans noted that they would use their career information system websites to provide information about POS. In the past, these websites typically received at least some of their funding under Section 118 of Perkins III. Perkins IV continued this authorization, but since July 2007, funds have not been appropriated to implement this section of the Act. These 12 states are continuing their career information websites without these funds.

### Discussion

The procedures for implementation of POS identified by the coding paralleled the results obtained in a survey conducted by the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTEC, 2007). In the summer of 2007, less than a year after Perkins IV had set the requirement for at least one POS, NASDCTEC surveyed its members to determine how they were responding to this mandate. A total of 47 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico responded to the survey. All of these respondents, except Puerto Rico, were among the state plans that were analyzed for this article. The OVAE had

required that 5-year state plans for the implementation of Perkins IV be submitted by April 1, 2008. It seems likely that at the time states responded to the NASDCTEC questionnaire, they were working on their 5-year plans.

The survey found that most states are using the 16 career clusters adopted by OVAE for planning their POS. The clusters used most frequently, reported by 78% of the states, were agriculture and health science. The coding of the state plans indicated that 75% of the states planned to use career clusters. The survey found that 35% of the states planned to develop POS at the state level. The comparable figure derived from the coding was 31%. With regard to the number of POS to be offered, the survey found 54% of the states requiring one program at the secondary and postsecondary levels. The coding found one program to be required in 53% of the state plans. In 43% of the plans, however, no reference to the number required was found.

Almost all of the plans described how POS will draw upon other high school improvement initiatives in the states. Overall, the plans implied that POS will be implemented as modified, refocused versions of existing methods rather than as major changes in how the states deliver CTE. Although POS were newly enacted, they incorporated features with which states have had some experience. The templates that the states will provide for the development of POS were being drawn from the career pathways that most states had adopted or planned to adopt. The methods used to disseminate information will employ existing publications and web-based resources that existed prior to POS.

This documentation of the use regarding established methods should not be interpreted as an implied criticism of the ways states plan to implement POS. In fact, modification of existing delivery methods should improve the changes for successful implementation. Initiatives that require major changes in traditional practices reduce their chances for success. Additionally, POS developed at the local level have a higher probability of successful implementation than POS developed at the state level.

It is apparent that the states wanted to qualify for the funds authorized by Perkins IV and prepared their plans to comply with the instruction issued by OVAE. The states have indicated their intentions were to develop POS that incorporated the features required by the legislation. As it has for 90 years, the state plan provided a means for translating federal policy into state and local actions. There is no guarantee, however, that these actions will yield the results that are desired: enhanced transition from high school and the attainment of postsecondary degrees and certificates. The success of POS will not be known until they have been implemented and evaluated.



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