

Personal Plans Of Study for Kansas Students



Why Personal Plans of Study?

The Kansas State Board of Education approved nine actions on February 13, 2008, relative to promoting comprehensive redesign with integration and partnerships. Essentially, the concept is to redefine the delivery model by integrating career/technical and academic standards. One of these actions (#3) states that the Board will “Support implementation of Individual Career Plans of Study for all students in 8th grade and above.” KSDE has defined this as the development of Personal Plans of Study (PPS) for all Kansas students in 8th grade and above.

To facilitate an efficient and effective model for implementation, KSDE has developed a template that will help shape local district decisions. When considering Personal Plans of Study (PPS) we encourage educators to view them as being a process as well as a product. The process of examining self-interest and aptitudes, setting goals, and laying out a plan that will lead toward those goals will serve students long after they have left high school.

The PPS

The PPS is not only a product, but also a concentrated effort to explore career opportunities that are available and to examine the type of training and aptitudes necessary for any selected career path. With career exploration and careful completion of the PPS components, students should be well on their way to making insightful and purposeful decisions about career goals. The PPS is designed to contain student assessments that reflect his/her abilities, personal interests, and both academic strengths and weaknesses. It should:

1. state the students’ career goals and intended postsecondary training;
2. contain a comprehensive 6 year educational plan based on the Kansas Career Clusters Model and Programs of Study, grades 8 through 14;
3. and include any other information that will assist the student in preparing a resume.

PPS Components

Several tools are available to be utilized by the counselor/career advisor to help implement the PPS. They include:

1. Kansas PPS Rating Sheet- A rubric designed to help measure the quality of implementation.
2. Kansas Career Clusters Model and Programs of Study: Career clusters groupings of Kansas occupations and industries based on common knowledge and skills. Programs of study are sequenced listings of courses and CTE/degree majors that connect student’s secondary and postsecondary educational experiences.
3. Kansas Career Pipeline: The KCP a comprehensive Internet-based education and career planning tool for all ages. The system is designed to facilitate active engagement by students while creating a “spark” for the learning and self-assessment that are essential to creating a successful roadmap for the future.
4. Guidance Checklist: A tool counselors/advisors can use to track the career advising of students.
5. Plan of Study Template: A tool designed to help advisor, student and parents track career advising, cluster/pathway progression, planned or completed courses, extracurricular activities and extended learning activities (i.e. service/community learning).
6. American Careers Publications

Models of Implementation

As a result of many factors (local option, Perkins mandates, awareness) some Kansas schools have implemented the PPS while many have not. Those that have had success with implementation have used one of the following tried and true methods:

- Advisor/Advisee Program,
- Integration with a required class or homeroom, and
- Creation of a new required career course.

Schools have found that any of the above methods will accomplish the goal; however, the key element with any or all is the planning. The planning must be accomplished thoughtfully, carefully and thoroughly. Schools rushing into any of these generally found their program failed and left the entire staff with distaste for the program. What follows is a discussion of each method mentioned with specific attention given to the planning and implementation process.

Advisor/Advisee Program

Advisor/Advisee programs have been around for quite some time and are successful in fulfilling many needs of both students and teachers. When the PPS process was first introduced, those schools with sound Advisor/Advisee based programs quickly embraced and incorporated it into their program with ease. Establishing an Advisor/Advisee program does take a fair amount of time to plan and implement, but it is an excellent model in which to engage students with the PPS. As with any method, goal setting, planning, implementation, and follow-up are key components to the success of a program. Guidance is available (i.e. counseling standards, curriculum guide) relative to suggested grade level topics; please remember that topics selected must relate to your schools' and students' specific needs.

Goal Setting

When beginning the PPS development process, clearly define your goals. Ask yourself:

- What do we want to accomplish?
- What do we need to accomplish?

Many schools have successful Advisor/Advisee programs and, if you ask them, you will find that they have similar goals, but also just as many different ones. Their goals are different because they have different needs, populations and environments. Many schools use the Advisor/Advisee program as a means to cover content that is related to career development and, in some cases, other academic areas.

The most important factor in beginning your program is to clearly define what you want the program to do for your students and staff. It is recommended that a small committee be formed to accomplish this task. It is important to have various stakeholder groups represented, but keeping it smaller rather than larger will increase effectiveness and efficiency. The principal, counselor, a career education teacher, regular education teacher, parent and student are recommended. It is also recommended that you initially start slowly with only one or two goals. Once you have your program up and running effectively, you can increase the Advisor/Advisee goals and curriculum to include wider variety of topics. The caution is, trying to do too many things early in the process

will place the success of your program at risk. Once this committee meets and your goals are established it is time to begin the planning process.

Planning Process

It is recommended that a team be established for planning implementation of the PPS process. A suggested structure or chain of command is as follows:

- The principal oversees and monitors the program, with the counselor actually facilitating the program.
- A teacher/leader should be established for each grade level to provide direction to the Advisor/Advisee program.

The counselor, along with the leaders, will establish what needs to be covered at each individual grade level in order to fulfill the overall goals of the program. KSDE recommends aligning these goals with the state counseling model standards. For example, at grade 9 topics may include goal setting, note/test taking skills, and personal/work values. For grade 10, topics could include world of work trends, relationships, and communication skills. At grade 11, topics such as problem solving, resumes, peer pressure, and consumer awareness (buying and maintaining a car) could be approached. Grade 12 includes such topics as tax forms, college applications, financial aid and apartment leasing. Further guidance relative to PPS curriculums will be provided on our web site.

It is also recommended that the grade-level leader not serve as a student advisor, but instead be available to observe and assist advisors during the advising sessions. Since the leaders will be responsible for completing lesson plans and preparing necessary advisory material, the load on the advisor should be relatively light.

The selection of the grade-level leader is an important decision. Select those who are supportive of change to an Advisor/Advisee program and are upbeat capable of motivating their students. These people are key to the success of your program, so choose carefully.

Topics that need to be covered in the planning process are as follows:

- A name for your Advisor/Advisee program; for example, *CATS* (Career and Academic Transition Strategies).
- A schedule for the Advisor/Advisee meetings.
 - Number of times you plan to meet each year (keep it manageable in the beginning).
 - How long each Advisor/Advisee meeting will last.
- Orientation and training for the advisors.
 - It is extremely important that your advisors be well prepared to lead sessions as well as understand the importance of the lessons they are to present. Plan an orientation to share the program with them; explain the Board actions that apply to the PPS and the many other benefits the Advisor/Advisee program can offer students. Assure them that the workload on their part will be minimal. Advisors will also need to receive training in the content you expect them to relay to the students. Having advisors who understand and believe in what they are doing is essential. The more they understand, the more comfortable they feel and the more positive they will be about the PPS. It is important to note that, regardless of the fabulous job that you do, there may be those who only semi-cooperate. Hopefully, with the principal's and grade-level leaders' presence from time to time, sessions will be productive.

- General content to be addressed at each grade level.
 - Each grade level leader along with the counselor should determine specific content. The counselor, who will be working with all groups, will be able to see the big picture.
- Long range plans.
 - Determine if you want students to stay with their original group throughout your program (e.g. 4 years).
 - Determine if the group will keep the same advisor throughout the program.

Implementation

Grade-level leaders will assume the most responsibility in the implementation of the program. Because of this added responsibility, some schools pay each leader a stipend. Below are recommended responsibilities of the *leader*:

- Meet with the counselor to design curriculum.
- Create lesson plans that are scripted and specific. They should tell the advisor what to say and do during the lesson. This assures that each individual receives the intended instruction and reduces stress for the teacher. It also allows for the use of a substitute teacher when necessary.
- Make copies needed for the Advisor/Advisee session.
- Meet with advisors to explain and discuss lesson plans/content within the lesson.
- Solicit feedback from advisors in order to meet advisor/student needs and improve lessons. Monitor sessions by visiting each advisor group each time they meet.
- Assist advisors during sessions when needed. Clarify concepts, answer questions, make additional copies and act as substitute when necessary. (The counselor may also assume this role, in addition to the group leader).

Again, it is very important to provide easy-to-follow scripted lesson plans and any materials needed with plenty of lead time so that teachers don't feel rushed. This helps decrease the burden on advisors/teachers and hopefully will increase the program acceptance.

Follow Up

As with any program, it is important to collect feedback on a periodic basis from a variety of sources. Students, parents and advisors need to be given the opportunity to let you know what they feel works and does not work. This feedback is a valuable toll for the leader to use for evaluation and improvement purposes. By allowing advisors and the students the chance to voice their opinions and suggestions, they begin to see the PPS program as "their program." Over time, this gives those involved ownership and builds a more supportive and positive attitude for the program.

The Advisor/Advisee program, when designed around the needs of the school and students, will be meaningful to all who are involved and the program will become an integral part of your students' education.

Integration of the PPS into a Class or Homeroom

Some schools prefer to integrate the PPS process into an existing class or homeroom. One method for incorporating the PPS into a pre-existing structure is to include a program in a class or homeroom that all students must take as part of their graduation requirement. The same steps necessary for an Advisor/Advisee program would apply to this method. Specific goals, structure and organization of personnel and curriculum development would need to be determined. Training and follow-up for the program are also necessary components to a successful program. Please refer to the steps covered in the Advisor/Advisee section of this document. An integrated approach has both good points and bad points. The good news is that the pre-existing structure is only minimally altered. Many have found that the negative of this approach is the added burden to the content of the selected class. Time once allocated to cover core content of that class is now reduced in order to allocate for completion of the PPS. Fidelity of implementation may become an issue because the PPS may not receive the time necessary for full implementation.

Creation of a Career Course as a Graduation Requirement

Some schools, in order to accommodate the PPS and allow for ample opportunity to complete them, have incorporated various course and other activities into their graduation requirements (local option). During the course, which students take each year of high school, they work on elements of the PPS. These courses generally meet daily for a short period of time, and at the end of the school year the student will earn a portion of a credit. In most cases they will receive $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ (block schedule) credit per year. In addition to the PPS work, other topics (i.e. comprehensive school counseling program, assessment prep, service learning, job shadowing, etc.) other topics may be covered that will help achieve other goals established by the school. This has proven to be a good approach for completing the PPS and allows for ongoing investigation and revisions. Again, if you are attempting to set up a new program to follow the Advisee portion of this paper.

If you select the career course as your vehicle for the PPS, remember to take into consideration how to work transfer students. More than likely, you will need to plan for various contingencies.

Transitions and the PPS

A goal we hope you embrace is to take the meaningfulness of the PPS beyond high school. The purpose of the PPS, is to allow students to plan and prepare for his/her post-secondary journey. Often the PPS becomes more than a collection of information that is too cumbersome to manage or utilize. More often than not, when seniors are handed their PPS folders, half of them end up never looking at it again. One way to increase the meaningfulness of the PPS is to have seniors required to produce a Career Portfolio that pulls the contents of their PPS folders into a few meaningful documents. Seniors are required to have the following documents:

- Resume
- One letter of recommendation
- One letter of application
- Social Security/Birth Certificate document
- Competency profiles
- Transcript (counselor supplies a final copy at the end of the year)
- Other (scholarship application; apprenticeship application etc.)

During the course of the Advisor/Advisee program, career class etc., students receive instructions for completing the portfolio requirements. In many cases it is only a matter of revising documents already in the PPS folder (e.g. resumes). The completion of the Career Portfolio could be a part of your graduation requirements, which assures that each graduating senior will complete one. Some schools provide seniors with a nice leather-like portfolio that contains sleeves for his/her documents and a sleeve for diskette and compact disks. They are encouraged to keep their documents on diskettes or CDs for easy revision and updates.

It is our hope that, through the process of completing the PPS, students learn far more than what they want to do after high school. Self-exploration, researching, and goal setting are valuable tools gained through the development of the PPS. A familiar quote comes to mind, the object of teaching a child is to enable that child to get along without the teacher.” Completing the PPS folder teaches the student a valuable process that will be used again and again throughout life as changes is encountered. Regardless of the method selected to implement the PPS requirement, the underlying principle is that of teaching the student to independently set career goals and achieve them.

Kent Reed, School Counseling Consultant
Kansas Dept. of Education
785-296-8109
kreed@ksde.org