Programs of study and personal plans of study are related but are not the same. Students’ programs of study are a result of collaborative efforts among schools and colleges to seamlessly coordinate classroom instruction, student guidance and counseling, career and technical student organizations, career development and community participation for a particular Career Cluster. Students’ personal plans of study should reflect programs of study, but should also be individualized based on their interests and needs.

Personal Plans of Study are more than just a listing of courses taken in high school. School organizations and community activities incorporated in personal plans of study give students practical experience to hone skills learned in the classroom and to develop personal qualities such as leadership and teamwork.

These types of activities along with other age appropriate career exploration activities are incorporated into personal plans of study. Personal plans of study are reviewed at least annually and revised as necessary to reflect any changes in students’ career and educational goals. Students and their families play a central role in the development of personal plans of study, but school counselors and teachers also have an important role to play. School Counselors work closely with students and their parents to develop personal plans of study that reflect individual students’ secondary and postsecondary aspirations.

Teachers should be cognizant of their students’ personal plans of study when developing coursework to ensure that classroom projects and activities have relevance for them. Families should be aware of the role their child’s activities can have for career development, and they should look for opportunities such as job shadowing, mentoring and internships so that students can gain real-world experience and can test career possibilities while still in school.

Individual student planning is a core component of every school’s comprehensive guidance and counseling program and is the vehicle through which students’ personal plans of study are developed and monitored. The process begins in elementary school with age appropriate career awareness activities, continues through middle school with more in-depth career and personal exploration, culminating in the development of students’ personal plans of study by the end of 8th grade.

Students who have clear goals and see relevance in their school work and who are actively involved in positive activities outside of the classroom invariably do better in school. It is vital that every school have a strong individual student planning process in place as part of the comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in order to help ensure that all students are benefitting from their personal plans of study.

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**Unemployment Rates, 2009**

- Less than high school graduate: 17%
- High school graduate or GED: 9.5%
- Some college or Associate Degree: 7.6%
- Bachelor’s Degree or higher: 3.4%

**Educational Attainment**

- Median Earnings in the Last 12 Months:
  - Less than high school graduate: $18,519
  - High school graduate or GED: $25,838
  - Some college or Associate Degree: $31,181
  - Bachelor’s Degree or higher: $46,055

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**Family File**

This seems early for my child to make career decisions. Will Career Clusters pigeonhole my child?

No. In fact, students attending schools that implement the Career Clusters framework should be better prepared for many careers beyond their career focus. Each personal plan of study involves a rigorous academic core. The student’s chosen focus provides a context and direction for coursework – a best practice for student motivation.