

We are a group of Teach Plus Mississippi Policy Fellows and classroom teachers from across the state passionate about ensuring every Mississippi student has the high-quality education they deserve. In 2020, the [Mississippi Education Achievement Council](#) (EAC) set a goal for 55 percent of working-age Mississippians to hold a high-value certificate, college degree, or industry-recognized credential by 2030. At the time, Mississippi's postsecondary attainment rate (which includes any degree, credential, or industry certification) was just 45.2 percent. This was below the national average of 51.3 percent, and state leaders recognized that raising the rate would be key to strengthening the "[quality and quantity of Mississippi's workforce](#)," as well as "improve the lives of individual Mississippians and contribute to Mississippi's current and future economic health".

Teach Plus Mississippi shares the vision of a workforce with the training or credentials to succeed in the 21st century. Whether a student is planning to attend college or enter the workforce directly after high school, we believe that postsecondary success begins in K-12. To that end, we also believe that Mississippi public schools can better prepare students to thrive after graduation. Despite a soaring graduation rate that now surpasses the national average, postsecondary attainment remains below 50 percent (48.7 percent as of [January 2025](#)) and continues to trail the national average. Meanwhile, [enrollment](#) in postsecondary institutions has declined sharply each year since the pandemic, from two in three students (67.4 percent) in the Class of 2021 to barely over half of students (56.8 percent) in the Class of 2024. Mississippi clearly still has a long way to go in facilitating postsecondary success.

Individual Success Plans (ISPs) are a promising but seemingly underutilized tool to prepare Mississippi students for postsecondary success. Students are currently required to have an ISP by the end of 7th grade that charts a five-year career exploration plan culminating in high school graduation. But while students are expected to revisit and revise these ISPs every year, Mississippi's Public School Accountability Standards have no requirements beyond 7th grade. As a result, in many school districts, ISPs become forgotten in high school. In the spirit of promoting College and Career Readiness, **we encourage the State Board of Education to require that school districts consult with students to revisit, revise, and utilize ISPs every year until graduation.**

INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS PLANS

An ISP is intended as a personalized career exploration plan for each Mississippi student that helps establish the necessary steps for success after graduation. In theory, this can be an effective tool for ensuring that high school graduates are College and Career Ready. According to the [Education Redesign Lab](#) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a number of states and individual districts have successfully implemented similar personalized learning plans. The particular content and structure of these plans can vary, but at a minimum they often monitor academic indicators and outcomes (such as

completed coursework), as well as document skills and experiences that are relevant to a student's postsecondary goals. These plans are intended to capture students' strengths and needs, and can be used to guide decision making at both the K-12 level (such as selecting courses) and beyond (such as identifying a postsecondary career path).

Studies have found that [engaging in individual student planning](#) can result in improved grades, increased enrollment in [rigorous coursework](#), and [enhanced goal-setting skills](#). In turn, according to the [Education Redesign Lab](#), these findings suggest that establishing formal plans can boost postsecondary enrollment rates and even increase the completion of postsecondary degrees or certificates. With [one of the lowest rates](#) of adults with a postsecondary credential in the nation, Mississippi has a lot to gain from this approach to promoting College and Career Readiness.

ISP IMPLEMENTATION IN MISSISSIPPI

Although Mississippi does have a requirement that all students have an ISP in middle school, the plans have become an underutilized resource for the remainder of their secondary education. With help from platforms like MajorClarity (an approved statewide computer platform for identifying career options), 7th graders across the state have an Academic Career Plan (ACP) that provides a career exploration plan for the next five years. But because there is no requirement to revisit, revise, or utilize the plans beyond 7th grade, many school districts are missing an opportunity to help students chart their course of study and prepare for postsecondary success.

Inconsistent implementation of ISPs is, in part, the result of a discrepancy between expectations and requirements. Documents published by the Mississippi Department of Education, such as [A Compass for College Preparation](#), state that ISPs should "be revisited every year and evolve along with students' interests and goals." But Mississippi's [Public School Accountability Standards](#) only require that "seventh-grade students are required to have an Individual Success Plan (ISP) prior to exiting the seventh grade." From our experience, we can confirm that districts are abiding by the requirement of creating an ISP in 7th grade while largely falling short of the expectation that ISPs be revisited every year.

"I think that it is important for Individual Success Plans to be updated annually because students change and grow a lot from 7th-12th grade. Interests may change for whatever reason. It is important for them to see them updated, especially closer to graduation, so that they can make more informed choices on what they want to do in the future. With the push for college AND career readiness, students need to see all opportunities available to them."

- Elizabeth Gibbons, high school English language arts teacher, Clarksdale Municipal School District

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The State Board of Education should require teachers, counselors, and other relevant staff members (e.g., career coaches) to work with students to revisit, revise, and utilize ISPs every year after 7th grade until graduation.

By amending Process Standard 14.1.1 in the [Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards](#) (or, alternatively, creating an additional Process Standard) to require that ISPs be revisited, revised, and utilized after 7th grade, the State Board of Education can ensure that these plans evolve with students' interests and achievements. This requirement will also encourage schools to be responsive to students' individualized needs as they approach graduation. The Process Standard should also create an opportunity for input from parents, as well as specify an exception for students with disabilities, whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) requires transition planning that's similar to an ISP.

2. The State Board of Education should ensure ISPs are digitized and transferable between districts.

Students moving from one district to another often have to start the ISP process over again, making it difficult to track a student's progress. Requiring that ISPs follow a student will mitigate this challenge. Ensuring that ISPs are digitized will help facilitate this process, as well as enable districts to track aggregate trends in students' ISPs (e.g., career interests, diploma and endorsement options, etc.).

To achieve these recommendations, the State Board of Education should amend or create a new Process Standard(s). The following amendments to Process Standard 14.1.1 is a suggested starting point:

Beginning in school year ~~2018-2019~~ 2025-2026, all seventh-grade students are required to have an Individual Success Plan (ISP) prior to exiting the seventh grade: that is subsequently revisited, revised, and utilized, with the opportunity for input from parents, every year until graduation. Students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) are not required to have an ISP. School districts are required to securely keep digitized records of students' ISPs. If a student transfers to another Mississippi school district, their ISP shall be transferred to the student's new school district.

CONCLUSION

ISPs provide Mississippi students the opportunity to begin exploring career pathways and planning a relevant course of study as early as 7th grade. But a lack of follow-through as students progress through high school greatly diminishes the ability of this tool to prepare students for postsecondary success. Promulgating a requirement that ISPs be revisited, revised, and utilized every year after 7th grade could go a long way toward promoting College and Career Readiness.

TEACH PLUS MISSISSIPPI POLICY FELLOWS

Alexandria Drake, Jackson Public Schools

Brandy Richardson, Scott County School District

Diala Chaney, Oxford School District

Elizabeth Gibbons, Clarksdale Municipal School District

Kim Murphy (Senior Policy Fellow), Pascagoula-Gautier School District

Sanford Johnson, Executive Director

Toren Ballard, State Policy Consultant

About Teach Plus

The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that affect their students' success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning for students.