

Research Brief

Establishing Accountability Metrics for Evaluating the Impact of Career Guidance Services on Academic, Career Development and Workforce Readiness Outcomes

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The U.S. Department of Labor (Wills & Mack, 2009) has released a report examining why there is little evidence linking participation in quality career guidance services with increased academic and workforce readiness outcomes. They argue that the reason for this dearth of evidence is the lack of a national policy regarding the accountability metrics schools and organizations must use to evaluate the quality and impact of their career guidance services. Recently, the National Collaborative on Career and Workforce Policy and Development was created to address this important challenge (NCCWPD). NCCWPD is being coordinated by the University of Wisconsin's Center on Education and Work, the Pennsylvania State University, National Career Development Association, and the Institute for Educational Leadership. Our mission is to play a leadership role in advocating for policies and accountability metrics that can be used to assess whether participation in quality career guidance services on indicators of student academic outcomes and workforce readiness.

Wills and Mack recommend that in this era of accountability, a common set of career guidance accountability metrics are vital for determining the level of return on investment that quality career guidance services provide to immediate outcomes and longer term workforce readiness outcomes. They further prescribe the need to establish technical assistance strategies for helping schools and organizations effectively use these accountability metrics in order to empower them in demonstrating the efficacy of the career guidance services being provided.

NCCWPD concurs with Wills and Mack's recommendation that a national consensus on accountability metrics must be established if there is to be any strategic efforts to demonstrate the positive impact of career guidance services on improving student academic outcomes and workforce readiness. Once a national consensus has been reached, the accountability metric system must be designed specifically for schools and organizations to upload their data and receive reports that they can use to demonstrate the efficacy of their career guidance services. The system will be modeled after the U.S. Department of Labor's Workforce Investment Streamlined Performance Reporting System (WISPIR) and will evaluate guidance services performance according to the quality and comprehensiveness of services offered, the impact of these services on student academic outcomes and workforce readiness, and return on investment to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the services.

NCCWPD is seeking to establish this national consensus and to develop an online accountability metric system that can be used by schools and organizations to demonstrate the efficacy of their career guidance services. Specifically, this project will build off of the work being conducted by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO, 1998), U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB, 2003) and the

Integrated Performance Information System project (IPI; King & Looney, 2004; Looney & King, 2005). Drawing from this previous work, three levels of accountability metrics must be considered when establishing the quality of career guidance services: 1) Were the career guidance services comprehensive and did they rely on empirically supported methods to design and deliver the services; 2) were the career guidance services implemented with fidelity and efficiency, and 3) depending on the population served, were the career guidance services able to demonstrate an impact on academic outcomes, post-secondary transitions, and/or workforce readiness.

Figure 1 describes three levels of accountability and metrics to consider in establishing a national consensus. The first level of accountability is the degree to which quality comprehensive career guidance services are being offered. Quality comprehensive career guidance services refers to the degree to which a range of services are offered and whether prior research evidence supports the importance of the services and effectiveness of the service delivery methods. What constitutes a comprehensive range of guidance services will vary based on the population being served. The second level relates to the degree to which career guidance services were delivered with fidelity and efficiency. The third level relates to the degree to which career guidance services can be demonstrated to have had an immediate and long-term impact.

Quality of Career Guidance Services

Designing quality and comprehensive career guidance services varies in content depending on the population served. A report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED, 2004) identified six different populations in need of quality career guidance: school age youth and adolescents, at-risk youth, post-secondary age young adults, unemployed adults, employed adults, and older adults. While the types of services may differ according to the developmental and practical needs of the populations being served, it is important to be able to articulate what range of services will be provided, whether the career guidance services rely on empirically supported curriculum and methods, whether a range of learning experiences are provided, and whether ILPs or ePortfolios are used to organize career development and record workforce readiness artifacts.

According to ACRN's career developmental guidelines (Figure 2) quality career guidance services should address personal/social development, education and lifelong learning, and career management. The OCED report (2004) concurs that quality career guidance services must focus on helping individuals develop the career management skills needed to make important life transitions.

The OCED report adds that quality career guidance services must offer learning opportunities designed to help all recipients develop workforce readiness skills and world of work experiences. The *Guideposts for Success* (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, 2007) offers a comprehensive list of empirically supported learning experiences that should be considered when designing career guidance services. The *Guideposts* organize the learning experiences according to five areas of focus that include school-based preparatory activities, career preparation and work-based learning experiences, youth development and leadership, connection activities with various community resources, and involvement of family and related support systems. Critical learning opportunities for

school-age youth and adults also include career and technical education, apprenticeships, and internships. Older youth and adults especially need access to education opportunities that result in tangible skills that result in a certificate or degree.

It is also important that research based best practices are incorporated into the career guidance services. While efforts are underway to generate a menu of empirically supported career guidance programs (e.g., What works clearinghouse), there are a number of studies that have supported the efficacy of career guidance interventions in promoting career development outcomes (Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Spokane & Oliver, 1983; Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1988). Brown and Ryan-Krane (2000) demonstrated that five critical ingredients appear to be essential in designing effective career guidance activities and Howard, Solberg, Kantamneni and Smothers (2008) added four additional empirically supported ingredients to create total list of nine ingredients that in combination increase the efficacy of career guidance activities. These ingredients include the use of written exercises, individualized interpretations, information about the world of work, learning about community supports, mastery experiences, verbal persuasion experiences, anxiety management, and building strong relational connections with adults and peers.

In order to help youth and adults to manage their career guidance experiences, the use of online ILPs or ePortfolios must be incorporated into the career guidance service delivery system. Most of the commercially available career information systems offer an ILP/ePortfolio that allows the individual to save artifacts of their career guidance and workforce readiness experiences. These artifacts can then be shared with admissions officers and employers.

Documenting whether quality and comprehensive career guidance services are being offered can be established using a formative evaluation model proposed by Sampson (2008). According to Sampson, a formative evaluation of the content of the career guidance services being offered consists of a description of the services and the theory and research that indicates how and why the services are important in promoting development. The perceived effectiveness of the services by key stakeholders can also provide important evidence of as to the importance of the content of the proposed services.

Fidelity and Efficiency

A second level of analysis is to assess the degree to which the services are being delivered appropriately (fidelity) and the degree to which services are reaching individuals targeted as needing the services (efficiency). The OCED Report (2004) emphasizes that career guidance services and career information must be accessible and that individuals needing services must be able to receive personal contact when requested or needed. More specifically, Sampson (2008) describes three levels of career guidance service delivery: self-help services, brief staff-assisted services, and individual case-managed services. Self-help services are appropriate for individuals with high career readiness who can make use of online career information sites or internet based resources with little personal attention. Brief staff-assisted services are needed for individuals with moderate career readiness and who need some guidance in getting started. A practitioner available in a one-stop resource center or who is available online should be able to provide brief support to an individual to help them get started and would be available if

additional brief chats are needed to help them continue making effective use of the career guidance services. Individual case-managed services are needed for individuals who are low in their career readiness as indicated by having multiple challenges, histories of poor work transition, or have other personality characteristics that warrant more support and structure. Brief and individual case-managed services can be conducted in a variety of in-person settings such as in classroom settings, groups, or through distance technologies such as internet or phone support.

Documenting fidelity and efficiency is achieved using a summative assessment. Data is needed to document that career guidance services were provided in the manner prescribed and that recipients were satisfied with the services received. This type of data can be collected through a combination of observations of the services being provided and satisfaction surveys following completion of the services. Efficiency is assessed by assessing the number of unduplicated recipients who have received services as well as the total number of services provided. The unduplicated number of recipients can be compared to the target population while total number of services provided indicates the number of career guidance activities actually delivered with the understanding that many recipients received multiple services.

Impact

Until the Federal Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (2006), accountability for most career guidance services involved assessing the content of services provided and gathering evidence as to whether the career guidance services were being delivered with fidelity and assessing the number of individuals receiving services. Similar to any projects that receive Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds (i.e., One-Stop Career Centers) the Federal Perkins Career and Technical Education Act added that schools must collect impact related indicators. By establishing a national consensus on using impact indicators to evaluate career guidance services, school counseling and special education, out of school youth services can join with career and technical education and one-stop career centers in being able to validate the importance of these services in helping youth succeed academically and to make effective post-secondary transitions, and help adults make effective career and work transitions. It is becoming more evident that future policy decisions for allocating funding for career guidance services will rely on impact related data. Therefore, establishing a national consensus on a set of accountability metrics will allow schools and organizations providing quality career guidance services to more effectively advocate for future funding support.

The proposed impact areas for consideration include Placement, Retention, Skill Improvement, Earnings, and Return on Investment. Placement refers to whether a person has entered post-secondary education or is attending workforce readiness courses or training programs. While initial attendance in a post-secondary education or training activity is important, higher impact is indicated by the types of courses they are taking, and credential or degree program they plan to complete. The credential/degree program has a direct economic value because the median income levels for various credentials and degrees are available and can be used to calculate future anticipated earnings.

Retention refers to whether progress is being made in the post-secondary education or training programs with longer retention having a stronger impact. Skills improvement refers to the tangible skills and outcomes individuals have acquired. In school settings, grades, achievement test scores, and college examinations can indicate skill improvement. For adults and youth, supervisor ratings of specific workforce skills and ILP artifacts can also be used as skill improvement indicators.

Expected earnings can be assessed as a direct result of whether the individual completes the post-secondary education or training program with a degree or credential. The median earnings associated with post-secondary degrees and training certificates provide a bench mark as to the relative impact of the career guidance services offered on improving the economic conditions of the community being served. Return on investment is the final level of impact whereby the anticipated income generation is compared with the costs of providing services.

Figure 1

Accountability Type	Metrics for Consideration
Quality of Career Guidance Services	Range of career guidance activities
	Empirically supported methods
	Range of Learning Experiences
	Incorporation of ILPs
Fidelity and Efficiency	Participation rates
	Satisfaction indices
	Cost per participant
Impact	
Placement	Attendance
	Course selections
	Credentials/degree programs
Retention	Quarterly/Semester
	Annual
Skill Improvement	Performance (grades, behavioral, skill acquisition)
	Achievement test scores
	ACT/SAT/GED scores

	ILP artifacts
	Educator/Supervisor ratings
Earnings	Graduation/Placement rates
	Completion of Post-secondary training
Return on Investment	Net impact of services on income generation/cost savings in relation to cost of providing services
	Expected median income earnings compared to cost of providing services

Figure 2

ACRN Career Development Guidelines	
Personal Social Development Domain	<p>Develop understanding of self to build and maintain a positive self-concept.</p> <p>Develop positive interpersonal skills including respect for diversity.</p> <p>Integrate growth and change into your career development.</p> <p>Balance personal, leisure, community, learner, family and work roles.</p>
Educational Achievement and Lifelong Learning Domain	<p>Attain educational achievement and performance levels needed to reach your personal and career goals.</p> <p>Participate in ongoing, lifelong learning experiences to enhance your ability to function effectively in a diverse and changing economy</p>
Career Management Domain	<p>Create and manage a career plan that meets your career goals.</p> <p>Use a process of decision-making as one component of career development.</p> <p>Use accurate, current and unbiased career information during career planning and management.</p> <p>Master academic, occupational and general employability skills in order to obtain, create, maintain and/or advance your employment.</p> <p>Integrate changing employment trends, societal needs and economic conditions into your career plans.</p>

Current Career Guidance Services Accountability Guidelines and Policies

A number of professional organizations and national initiatives have either initiated accountability plans or have been mandated through federal funding to incorporate accountability metrics into the evaluation reports. Some of these include: The American School Counseling Association's National Model (ASCA; 2003), the Federal Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (2006), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), and the National Career Development Guidelines.

The ASCA National Model articulates that comprehensive services must include academic, interpersonal/social, and career development activities. Academic and interpersonal/social development constitutes workforce readiness skills as specified by both the Career Clusters Initiative (2009) and Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009). Career development activities offer the opportunity for students to become aware of how educational opportunities relate to helping them achieve self-determined occupational goals and aspirations. By creating a common set of performance measures, ASCA will be in a stronger position to advocate for the value of comprehensive guidance

activities on serving the schools need to meet No Child Left Behind indicators and support the needs of the community to maintain a competitive workforce.

ASCA describes a number of objectives that can be effectively evaluated in regard to impact on student outcomes and workforce readiness. For the Academic domain, ASCA student objectives include: Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span; students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions; and students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others. For the Career Development domain, ASCA student objectives include: Students will complete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial post-secondary options, including college; students will employ strategies to achieve future career goals with success and satisfaction; students will make decisions, set goals and take necessary action to achieve goals. For the Personal and Social Development domain, ASCA student objectives include: Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work and to life at home and in the community; students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, training and the world of work; and students will understand safety and survival skills.

The Perkins Career and Technical Education Act articulates that schools need to provide career and technical education opportunities that align with preparing students with the workforce readiness skills needed to successfully enter local industries. Currently the Perkins Act is part of the Workforce Investment's Act list of programs that are required to provide a range of performance measures. Other organizations receiving funding from the Workforce Investment Act also conduct career guidance services as an integral part of supporting the development of workforce readiness skills. These indicators include proficiency attainment, completion of a degree or credential, placement and retention in post-secondary education or alternative employment settings.

IDEA mandates that students are provided with individualized education plans as well as a post-secondary transition plan. Performance indicators are only mandated to include information as to whether schools and districts have effectively implemented the requirements. By adding performance indicators that evaluate the impact of services on students' academic outcomes and workforce readiness, schools will be able to demonstrate the positive impact they are having on student development and preparing students to enter the world of work. Currently IDEA prescribes that students and counselors will regularly review IEPs, and will be able to clearly define access and accommodation needs and other academic issues, such as financial aid options; Students will develop a practical understanding of work-site accommodations and income requirements; and Students will acquire independent living skills by utilizing their interests, community and family support, healthcare and transportation needs, and living skills, and will be encouraged to participate in leisure opportunities and volunteer services.

The National Career Development Guidelines (NCDG) that were established by the America's Career Resource Network and later adopted by the National Career Development Association. The NCDG does articulate the need to evaluate career guidance services in terms of its impact on key outcomes such as

readiness to pursue post-secondary training and education, school attendance, graduate rates, and readiness to enter the world of work (Wall & Fuller, 2005). However, these indicators have not been established as a common set of indicators to be used by schools or organizations to measure impact of career guidance services.

NCDG describes a number of objectives that can be effectively evaluated with regard to impact. For the Educational Achievement Lifelong Learning Domain, NCDG student objectives include: Attain educational achievement and performance levels needed to reach personal and career goals; and participate in ongoing, lifelong learning experiences to enhance ability to function effectively in a diverse and changing economy. For the Career Management Domain, NCDG student objectives include: Create and manage a career plan that meets his/her career goals; use a process of decision-making as one component of career development; use accurate, current and unbiased career information during career planning and management; master academic, occupational, and general employability skills in order to obtain, create, maintain and/or advance your employment; and Integrate changing employment trends, societal needs, and economic conditions into your career plans. For the Personal Social Development Domain, NCDG student objectives include: Develop understanding of self to build and maintain a positive self-concept; develop positive interpersonal skills including respect for diversity; Integrate growth and change into your career development; and, balance personal, leisure, community, learner, family, and work roles.

Establishing a National Consensus on Accountability Metrics

NCCWPD proposes to replicate methods described by King and Looney (2004) to establish a national consensus on the accountability metrics to be used in assessing quality career guidance services. King and Looney describe how 30 states established consensus on accountability metrics related to workforce development and related programs. Such programs according to Workforce Investment Act testimony by George Scott, Director of the U.S. Education, Workforce, and Income Security (GAO-09-396T, 2009) focus on offering three areas: 1) core services related to job placement and providing labor market information, 2) intensive services related to literacy skills, assessment, case management, managing conflict skills, and gaining high school diplomas or their equivalent, and 3) training services related to skills and on the job training skills. While important, current workforce accountability discussions are not including career guidance services as part of the process. Inclusion of career guidance services should expand the range of accountability indicators to include career search skills, self-awareness and understanding how one's interests, skills, and values relate to different occupational opportunities, and the development of career plans that include short and long term goals.

Our proposal is to replicate the consensus building methods described by King and Looney (2004) using career guidance services to frame the discussion. According to King and Looney, representatives from 30 states met to brainstorm a range of possible accountability metrics. A total of 30 indicators were identified and state representatives voted for a metric, left it blank, or vetoed the metric. In voting for a metric or vetoing the metric, the delegates provided a rationale for their opinion. Both the tallies and reasons were summarized for further discussion and analysis. The final step was to then determine which subset of the 30 indicators would serve as the core accountability measures.

By focusing on establishing accountability metrics for career guidance services, it is expected that replication of this method will include a wider range of schools and organizations representing the six areas identified in the OCED (2004) report: school age youth and adolescents, at-risk youth, post-secondary age young adults, unemployed adults, employed adults, and older adults. In addition, the focus on this accountability metric includes establishing content validity standards for determining whether quality career guidance services are being provided.

Accessing the Accountability Metrics

Once a national consensus is established, it is important to provide resources to help schools and organizations conduct their own evaluations. The second part of NCCWPD's proposal is to design an online system that allows schools and organizations to enter their own data in order to receive designed reports they can use to communicate the impact of their career guidance services. A similar national system called WISPR will allow organizations receiving WIA funds to input performance information. However, no date has been set as to when the system will be ready (GAO-09-396T, 2009) and it does not appear that the system will provide reports to the organization in a format they can use to communicate the positive impact of their services. The purpose of our online reporting system will be to help schools and organizations communicate to their stakeholders the impact their career guidance services are having on academic, career and workforce readiness outcomes.