

Would like to formulate career plan for high school and beyond?

Dear Student:

In your Universal Encouragement Program survey, you indicated that you would like assistance in formulating an education and career plan. You do not need to have your whole future figured out to begin planning for it. An education and career plan helps you organize your ideas, explore possibilities, and make thoughtful choices about what to do next. Your plan can grow and change as you learn more about yourself and the opportunities available to you.

Give your thoughts a focus. Writing down your interests, strengths, questions, and goals makes them easier to examine. What do you enjoy learning? What problems would you like to solve? What matters to you in a future job—helping others, creativity, financial security, independence, or something else? Your plan gives you a place to connect these ideas and identify what you still need to learn.

Choose electives with a purpose. Elective courses offer opportunities to explore interests and build useful skills. For example, a student interested in health careers might explore anatomy or health science; someone curious about design might try art, computer graphics, or engineering. An unfamiliar subject may introduce you to possibilities you have never considered. Together, we can select courses that support your interests, meet graduation requirements, and prepare you for possible education or training after high school.

Plan experiences that help you test your ideas. Learning about an occupation is valuable; experiencing some of its activities can tell you more. Your plan might include a conversation with someone in a career that interests you, job shadowing, volunteering, a school club, a personal project, an internship, or part-time work. Choose each experience with a question in mind: *What would I like to find out?* Afterward, record what you enjoyed, what challenged you, and whether you want to explore further. Discovering that a career does not fit you is useful progress, too.

Connect today's choices with longer-term education and training. Different careers require different preparation. Your plan can help you compare apprenticeships, career and technical programs, certificates, two-year and four-year degrees, and additional professional education. Look at admission requirements, time needed, costs, financial assistance, and the qualifications required to enter an occupation. In middle school, begin by exploring broad possibilities. As you move through high school, add specific courses, application deadlines, and preparation steps.

Put your plan into action. A useful plan includes manageable next steps. Instead of writing only “explore engineering,” you might write, “Before choosing next year’s classes, talk with my

counselor about engineering courses and interview someone who works in the field.” Include a target date and identify someone who can help. If transportation, cost, scheduling, or another barrier makes an opportunity difficult, let me know so we can look for an accessible alternative.

Review and adapt your plan. Revisit it at least once each semester and before selecting courses. Ask yourself: *What have I learned? Have my interests changed? What should I do next?* You may revise a goal, explore another career, or choose a different education pathway. Changing your plan in response to new information is a sign that you are learning and making informed decisions.

Research supports the value of active career exploration and preparation. An international OECD study analyzing ten datasets from eight countries found that teenagers who explored, experienced, and thought about their future work often had better employment outcomes as adults, including lower unemployment, higher earnings, and greater career satisfaction. These findings show associations; they do not mean that planning guarantees a particular outcome.

Research also suggests that structured guidance can help students become more confident about making career decisions. A study involving 280 Italian high school students found that a career guidance program improved students’ confidence in their ability to make career decisions and encouraged career exploration.

The value of your plan comes from **using it**: asking questions, choosing experiences, reflecting on what you learn, and deciding on your next steps. A sample plan format and some helpful resources follow to help you get started.

Bring your ideas, your questions, and any concerns you have to the counseling office. We can work together to develop a plan that reflects your interests and helps you move toward a future that matters to you. If you prefer, you can send your plan to me by email, and I will review and comment.

Sincerely,

Your Counselor

Research references

- Covacevich, C., Mann, A., Santos, C., & Champaud, J. (2021). [*Indicators of teenage career readiness: An analysis of longitudinal data from eight countries*](#). OECD Education Working Papers, No. 258.
- Chiesa, R., et al. (2016). [*Career decision-making self-efficacy change in Italian high school students*](#). Journal of Counseling & Development.

Free Resources to Help You Explore and Plan

You can use these free resources to investigate careers and add information to your education and career plan:

- [**My Next Move**](#): Explore careers by keyword, industry, or interests. Its free O*NET Interest Profiler suggests occupations you may want to investigate. Use your results as starting points for exploration.
- [**CareerOneStop**](#): Find career information, interest assessments, education and training options, and information about wages and employment trends. Use these tools to compare possibilities and identify preparation requirements.
- [**BigFuture**](#): Use College Board's free resources to explore careers, investigate colleges and training pathways, and learn about scholarships and paying for education. Its planning checklist can help you identify next steps.
- [**Apprenticeship.gov**](#): Learn about apprenticeships and explore programs that combine work with structured learning. Consider whether this pathway fits careers you want to investigate.

See next page for a formatted planning document. Feel free to edit the document to fit your planning needs.

My Education and Career Plan

Name: _____ Grade: _____

Date: _____ Next review date: _____

1. What I know about myself

Subjects and activities I enjoy:

My strengths and skills, including those I want to develop:

What matters to me in my future work and life:

2. Careers I want to explore

List two or three careers or fields that interest you. It is okay to be unsure.

Questions I want to answer about these possibilities:

3. My course choices

Required courses and electives that will help me prepare or explore:

Course	How it supports my interests or goals
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4. Experiences that will help me learn

Consider a career conversation, job shadowing, volunteering, a club, a project, an internship, or part-time work.

Experience I want to try What I want to learn Target date

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

After an experience, ask: *What did I enjoy? What challenged me? How did it affect my interests?*

5. Education or training after high school

Options I want to investigate—for example, an apprenticeship, certificate, technical program, or college degree:

What I need to learn about requirements, time, costs, and financial assistance:

6. My next steps

Action	Who can help me?	Complete by
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_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

7. Reviewing and updating my plan

Complete this section when you review your plan.

What have I learned since my last review?

What interests, goals, or circumstances have changed?

What will I update, and what will I do next?

This plan is a working guide. Review it each semester and before choosing courses. You can revise it as you learn and your interests, goals, and opportunities evolve.