

How can schools create equitable postsecondary pathways for traditionally underserved students?

Recent [state-level college and career readiness benchmark](#) data demonstrate achievement gaps for many Oklahoma students, suggesting that specific student populations may be experiencing barriers in receiving meaningful college and career readiness support. These include traditionally underserved students – students of color, students in poverty, students learning English, students with disabilities, migratory students and homeless students.

The information in this document was developed to provide research-based guidance to schools to expand postsecondary opportunities for all students.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

According to the Oklahoma State Department of Education's (OSDE) [Fast Facts](#) for the 2020-21 school year, Oklahoma students are more diverse than ever. Economically disadvantaged students make up 58% of the total student population, and nearly 53% are students of color.

Meanwhile, a [recent report from The Education Trust](#) revealed significant gaps between the percentage of students and teachers who are members of racial and ethnic groups other than White in the 2019-20 school year. These gaps were largest between Latino, multiracial and Native American students and teachers.

With diversity in the state's student population increasing much more rapidly than in the educator workforce, it is imperative that schools incorporate strategies and programs that support equitable postsecondary pathways for all students.

Designing a flexible [Individual Career Academic Planning \(ICAP\)](#) process provides all students the opportunity to participate in career planning activities, rigorous coursework and career exploration activities. Students' ICAPs are designed to ensure they graduate ready to obtain gainful employment that matches their passions and interests while still earning a living wage. Implementing a [College and Career Readiness Scorecard](#) can also help all students be successful.

When creating ICAP programs that are equitable for all students, it is important for schools to engage students and families – and to keep in mind that families can extend to tribal leaders, faith communities and other community-based mentors. To ensure family voice is represented in the ICAP, schools should consider using the [Oklahoma Family Engagement Framework](#).

KEY INSIGHTS

- Explore sources for [high-quality work-based learning opportunities for all students](#).
- Consider [increasing access to effective college and career advisors or counselors](#).
- Examine inequities in college and career preparatory resources on the OSDE's [Postsecondary Indicator Guidance](#) resource.

SEE ALSO

- [Oklahoma School Counselor Corps initiative](#)
- [How can schools support English Learners?](#)
- [How can schools use data to identify equity gaps for traditionally underserved students? \(coming soon\)](#)

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Planning for life after high school can be a challenge for many students and families, but there are effective ways to engage them in the planning process. Virtual engagement can be a convenient tool to ensure full communication with families.

Using virtual mediums for students to attend [college and career fairs](#) on demand or from home can eliminate barriers related to work schedules, transportation and travel time. Additionally, redesigning parent-teacher conferences to a [student-led model](#) and including students' ICAPs can quickly transform conversations with families from a deficit to a strength model.

College and career advising that includes students' families can address inequities by providing a clear roadmap for students and their families to understand how to be successful in life after high school. This [out-of-school time college and career toolkit](#) includes a number of helpful tips for creating a culture of college and career readiness with high expectations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Schools should consider using tribal consultation to support ICAP efforts. Districts are required to conduct consultations to ensure all students who are members of a federally or state-recognized tribe within 50 miles of the district boundary are fully served. The OSDE's [Indian education web page](#) includes resources on tribal consultations, technical assistance and more.
- Consider completing an [equity audit](#) using school-level data to locate achievement gaps among student groups. It is important to be aware that results may be more indicative of opportunity gaps – gaps in access to necessary resources – than student ability. The Alliance for Resource Equity's [equity toolkit](#) includes strategies to reduce opportunity gaps.
- Building relationships with students is crucial to student success and well-being, but teachers cannot do this alone. School counselors play a vital role in making meaningful connections with students, particularly in supporting equitable ICAP planning. According to a [report from the Education Trust](#), students of color and from low-income families benefit from having more access to school counselors.
- Establish a [quality rubric](#) for equitable Individual Career Academic Planning.
- Consider implementing the [College Career Math Ready \(CCMR\) course](#), which emphasizes understanding mathematics concepts rather than memorizing procedures. By engaging students in real-world applications, CCMR develops critical-thinking skills students will use in college and their careers.
- Create a supportive network for first-year high school students to ensure their success in postsecondary programs. Consider creating a [college readiness team](#) whose members understand meaningful approaches to supporting students in their ICAP plans.