



STATE OF NEW MEXICO
PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
300 DON GASPAR
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87501-2786
Telephone (505) 827-5800
www.ped.state.nm.us


HANNA SKANDERA
SECRETARY-DESIGNATE OF EDUCATION

SUSANA MARTINEZ
Governor

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Principals, Charter School Administrators, Administrators for State-Supported Schools, REC Directors, Special Education Directors

FROM: Hanna Skandera, Secretary-Designate of Education 

RE: **GUIDANCE FOR NEXT STEP PLANS FOR STUDENTS IN GRADES 8–12**

The purpose of this memo is to review certain statutory requirements for Next Step Plans (NSPs) for students in grades 8–12 under state law at 22-13-1.1 NMSA 1978 and state rule at Subsection J of 6.29.1.9 NMAC. I also want to let you know about an NSP template that is available on the Public Education Department's (PED's) website.

1. What is the Next Step Plan (NSP)?

The NSP is a personal, written plan that is developed by each student at the end of grades 8–11 and during the senior year (grade 12). The purpose of the plan is to target the student's postsecondary interests, and set forth the studies he or she will complete during high school in order to be on track for graduation. The student reviews and updates his or her NSP annually, and each year's plan must explain any differences from the previous year's NSP. For grades 8–11, the plan is called an **interim NSP**, and for grade 12 it is called a **final NSP**.

2. What timelines apply?

State rule requires that each year's NSP must be completed within 60 days of the preceding school year. For example, the NSP for grade 9 must be completed before the end of grade 8.

3. Who must assist the student in developing the NSP?

The law requires that student's parents (or legal guardians) and the student's guidance counselor (or other school officials charged with coursework planning) consult with and assist the student in developing the NSP. The plan is signed by the student, parents, and guidance counselor and then **must** be filed with the principal of the student's high school.

4. What else goes into the NSP?

The NSP also reflects steps the student will take in collaboration with his or her guidance counselor (or other school official charged with coursework planning) to do the following:

- Research personal career interests or goals
- Plan postsecondary education
- Explore financial aid opportunities
- Examine industry certification or other career options

In addition, the school must ensure that, while developing the NSP, the student is reasonably informed about all of the following:

- curricular and course options, including honors or advanced placement courses, dual-credit courses, distance learning courses, career clusters, pre-apprenticeship programs or remediation programs that the college and workplace readiness assessments indicate to be appropriate
- opportunities available that lead to different post-high-school options
- alternative opportunities available if the student does not finish a planned curriculum

5. What happens in grade 12?

Each student must complete a **final NSP** during the senior year (grade 12) and prior to graduation. Just like the interim NSPs, the final NSP **must** be filed with the principal of the student's high school and signed by the student, the student's parents, and the student's guidance counselor (or other school official charged with coursework planning for the student). The final NSP is filed in the student's cumulative file upon graduation.

6. What about a student who is 18 years old?

Under state law at Subsection B of 12-2A-3 NMSA 1978, a person is no longer a minor the moment he or she turns 18 years old. Therefore, for schools working with a student who is 18 or older, parental signature and approval of the NSP is **not** required. However, best practice is that, with the student's consent, the school notifies the parents about any NSP meetings. The student who is 18 or older may still wish to have his or her parents participate in the NSP process and assist in making informed decisions—especially because many parents support their child's postsecondary education or career options. However, this is the student's decision and schools should respect his or her choice in this matter.

7. How does the NSP requirement apply to students eligible as gifted?

For students identified under state criteria as gifted only and receiving special education services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for gifted education, there is no difference. Follow the basic NSP requirements and process outlined above.

8. What about students identified as English Language Learners (ELLs)?

For students identified as ELL and receiving Title III services, there is no difference. Follow the basic NSP requirements outlined above.

9. Does the NSP requirement apply to students with disabilities?

Yes, but not in the same way. Students with disabilities receive special education services through an IEP. State law provides that an IEP that meets the NSP plan requirements described above **and** all applicable transition and procedural requirements of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for a student with a disability satisfies the state's NSP requirements.

That means the student's IEP team for grades 8–12 must incorporate all of the state's NSP requirements into the student's IEP. Moreover, once a student reaches age 14, the IEP must also include all the **transition IEP** requirements of state special rule at Subsection G of 6.31.2.11 NMAC and the federal IDEA at 34 CFR Secs. 300.320(b) and 300.324(c). **A separate NSP is not needed.**

For more information and guidance, please see the state's technical assistance manual *Graduation Options for Students with Disabilities* available at this link:

<http://ped.state.nm.us/SEB/technical/GraduationOptionsStudentsWithDisabilities.pdf>.

10. How does the NSP requirement apply to a student who has an intervention plan though the school's Student Assistance Team (SAT)? How about a student with a Section 504 Accommodation Plan?

For students in grades 8–12 who have a **SAT Intervention Plan**, the SAT does the following:

- The student's NSP is part of the review of student data in Step 1 of every SAT meeting and includes a review of any college and workplace readiness assessments.
- The school may determine that the SAT serves as the "school officials who are charged with coursework planning" for this student and work together with the student and parents to develop the NSP, along with any other necessary SAT interventions to create coordinated plans.
- NSPs need to reflect any intervention classes or modifications prescribed by the SAT.
- Regardless of what school officials serve the student to develop his or her NSP, **the SAT** is responsible to ensure that the student's SAT Intervention Plan and the NSP are either combined into one cohesive plan **or** that the two plans are aligned and complement each other.

For students in grades 8–12 with a **Section 504 Accommodation Plan**, the student's Section 504 team mirrors the same process as for a student who has a SAT Intervention Plan.

- The student's NSP is part of the annual review of student's Section 504 plan and includes a review of any college and workplace readiness assessments.
- The school may determine that for this purpose, the Section 504 team serves as the "school officials who are charged with coursework planning" for this student and work together with the student and parents to develop the NSP, along with any other necessary accommodations to create coordinated plans.

- NSPs need to reflect any accommodations prescribed by the Section 504 team.
- Regardless of what school officials serve the student to develop his or her NSP, **the Section 504 team** is responsible to ensure that the student's Section 504 Plan and the NSP are either combined into one cohesive plan **or** that the two plans are aligned and complement each other.

11. Where can we find an NSP template and instructions?

The PED is pleased to provide an NSP template with instructions on its website at www.ped.state.nm.us. Click on the A–Z Directory and look under “N.” The template incorporates all the elements required in state law, but its use is **not** mandated. Schools may adapt the template for their local needs or create their own template.

12. What are helpful resources?

Listed below are suggested resources for developing the NSP. The PED does not endorse these resources and they are provided for informational purposes only.

Assisting Families in Helping High School Students Plan for the Future

<http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/enhancing-student-learning/helping-your-child-plan-future.asp>

Career Planning K–12

<http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/enhancing-student-learning/career-planning.asp>

NM Workforce Development System

<http://www.dws.state.nm.us>

Department of Labor's One Stop Center

<http://careeronestop.org>

Career Resources Network

www.ILWorkInfo.com

Career Plan of Study Templates

<http://www.careertech.org/career-clusters/resources/plans.html>

Please feel free to forward and/or share this memo with relevant staff, especially guidance counselors, special education teachers, and SAT core team members. If you have questions, please call the PED's Help Desk at (505) 827-4296. For the complete state rule for NSPs at Subsection J of 6.29.1.9 NMAC, please go <http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title06/06.029.0001.htm>.

Guidance for Next Step Plans

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cc: PED Senior Team

Dr. Melissa W. Lomax, Program Manager, Career and College Readiness Bureau

Dr. Tom Dauphinee, Deputy Director Assessment and Accountability Division

Sandra Schwarz, Acting Director, Special Education Bureau

Education Administrators, Strategic Initiatives and Constituents Services Division