**ACP evaluation – Year 2 (2016-17)
Former Pilot District Coordinators Follow-up Interviews
Preliminary Report
February 1, 2017**

**Introduction**

In November 2016, evaluators at WCER began contacting former ACP Coordinators from the 2015-16 Pilot Year Districts to invite them to participate in brief, follow-up interviews over the telephone. The evaluation team intended to use these interviews to take stock of the progress that pilot districts had made since WCER evaluators interviewed them during the spring of 2016. Of the 22 pilot district coordinators interviewed in spring 2016, 10 former pilot coordinators responded and participated in interviews. Three invitation emails bounced back for having email addresses that were no longer valid, most likely indicating that those particular individuals had retired or moved to other districts. One person agreed to an interview but was subsequently not available, and the remainder did not reply to the invitation. Participants in the 10 interviews, conducted from November 2016 to January 2017, were distributed across the original cohorts and represented districts from a variety of geographical areas, district sizes, and stages of implementation.

**Findings**

*Progress and leadership and implementation plans*

Overall, the respondents reported that their ACP work was progressing and going well. Districts mostly maintained their original ACP committees/teams, but in some cases expanded with new members such as additional teacher and other staff representatives, area university and technical college representatives, parents, local business partners or chamber of commerce members. Three districts mentioned moving or having moved from district-based to school-based teams. Two districts formed additional ACP advisory committees that included local business members. All respondents were still serving on their ACP committees, but not all were still in the leadership/coordinator role, as several committees changed to being teacher-led; additionally, in one district, the former pilot coordinator left her school counselor position and became a district ACP coordinator.

In terms of whether districts continued to use their original pilot year plan, seven of the districts reported continuing with the same plan, and one district reported using the same plan but slowing their timetable down. Two districts mentioned having modified their plans—one reported “refocus[ing] ourselves and getting back to what is best practice instead of just putting out ideas because people just wanted to do them.” The other, a larger district with multiple middle and high schools, modified their plan by changing to school-based teams, each of which adapted their own individual plan. Five districts reported in the spring 2016 interview that they planned to delay one or more activities until this year. Of those five, one had delayed their schedule modification activities, a process which was not yet complete. One district pushed their gap analysis/needs assessment to this year, which it has since completed. Two districts have partially completed their delayed activities—a gap analysis in one case and Board approval of local ACP policy along with a written implementation plan in the other. The fifth district had delayed adapting a pre-existing scope and sequence and then changed their mind and decided to develop their own, a project that was still underway.

*Successes*

Reported successes varied greatly, probably due to the various stages of readiness and implementation that these districts enjoyed. Three districts cited that they were holding ACP meetings or conferences with parents, and three deemed their ACP webpage and/or other communication activities to be a success. Three districts reported a change in the culture of the district marked by more buy-in and involvement in ACP. Building ACP time into the regular school schedule and getting all teachers on Career Cruising were cited as successes by two districts. Other successes reported were moving to school-based ACP leadership teams, completing the development of a scope and sequence, developing a system of career pathways aligned to high school course offerings, and being asked by other districts to share their materials.

*Challenges*

As reported in the pilot year report, the most commonly cited challenge (6 mentions) was that of finding sufficient time to do all the ACP related work, both at the planning and the implementation stages. In one district, finding time to deliver ACP services was seen as a challenge because they had not been able to make scheduling modifications. Respondents also mentioned the lack of engagement or buy-in by some stakeholders. Two respondents mentioned lack of teacher buy-in, two districts reported that parent engagement was a challenge, and one district was challenged by trying to coordinate with feeder schools from a variety of districts that had very different (or no) ACP provisions. One respondent mentioned having trouble getting principals to become involved, reporting, “[Principals] are really busy but they don’t have a clue, we can’t get them to come to meetings. They’re on the committee but they don’t show up.” One district also mentioned having some technical challenges associated with Career Cruising. As this respondent reported, “the Career Cruising people are nice and helpful but there are issues that are coming up, and no way for districts to communicate about how they are addressing these issues that come up.”

Here and elsewhere in the interviews, several districts expressed challenges related to finding ways to measure outcomes or “effects” of ACP on students. One respondent wondered, “How do you measure career based learning? How do you measure community learning experience?” Another respondent asked more generally how to know whether “what we are doing is having an effect on the students? We need more training on how to analyze results and write the right questions.” Similarly, one respondent believed that teacher buy-in would increase “once [teachers] realize students are more engaged because of the ACP process. But how do we measure that?”

*Scope and sequence, grade-level implementation plans and percentage of students being reached*

In terms of developing a scope and sequence for ACP activities, five districts reported that their scope and sequence was still in development, one reported having a completed draft that was being piloted, one reported that they had not yet begun, and three had completed the scope and sequence and were implementing it. Similarly, five districts reported that they were reaching 100 percent of students with full ACP implementation. Three districts reported that 100 percent of students were receiving parts of the ACP curriculum during the roll-out phase. One district reported having a grade-level implementation plan, which they were not yet implementing as they had not decided on which software to use. One district reported that implementation had not yet expanded past the pilot schools.

*Professional development and resources*

All 10 districts reported that their staff were receiving professional development related to ACP. Five districts specified professional development around Career Cruising, which was delivered in a variety of ways: via CESAs, webinars, and train-the-trainer approaches. Districts were also providing professional development around ACP awareness, their curricula, and specific lessons. Some districts delivered this professional development on a building level, with building teams leading the training. One respondent reported that assistant principals in their district were responsible for training all advisory teachers and counselors on a building level. Other districts delivered their professional development at the district level, led by district teams. A number of districts have done so on both levels, and again, CESAs were mentioned as providers of professional development. One district reported that they had not done much professional development as their ACP implementation plan was in a“waiting pattern” while they chose a software system. Instead, teachers, who had been introduced to ACP during the pilot year and trained on both software systems, were creating materials on their own because, as the interviewee reported, they were “creative and progressive and want to do what’s right for kids” while they wait. One district mentioned that they altered their means of providing professional development around specific ACP lessons. Originally, they provided lessons to teachers to deliver to students over time, as needed according to the scope and sequence. However, they realized “that didn’t work” and instead they now provide teachers with “the entire year—the big picture” and communicate what the lessons are intended to achieve as well as providing resources so that the teachers can then “break it into chunks.” They referred to this as “one big a-ha.”

Regarding DPI’s resources for ACP, seven respondents reported using a variety of materials such as the “checklist,” DPI’s website, the “My ACP Journey lesson,” planning documents, and rubrics, reporting that these materials were “very helpful,” “awesome,” “fabulous,” and “powerful.” Two respondents mentioned Career Cruising as an important resource. Three districts reported no longer using many DPI resources, as they believed they had moved beyond the need for them. One district reported that some of their schools found the DPI activities “really wordy” and that it took “too much to get through them all—the teachers just want the down and dirty—they are good lesson plans and they are super thorough but too much.” Only one respondent mentioned a useful additional resource, suggesting that a means to help parents and teachers understand workforce development data was necessary, as their understanding was “so important.” Seven respondents mentioned that the ACP conference, held in December 2016, was helpful. One interviewee reported that the conference was “much more warmly received than anyone anticipated.”

*Collaboration and partnerships*

Among these 10 districts, only one reported that they had not engaged in collaboration with other districts around ACP. Two districts mentioned collaborating via CESA counselor network meetings. Two respondents mentioned collaboration taking place during the ACP conference. Five districts mentioned collaborating via visiting other districts, hosting visitors, making presentations, and other forms of contact. One district described the county counselor consortium that they created with neighboring districts, which featured monthly meetings involving the sharing of materials and ideas.

In terms of forming new partnerships, only two respondents reported that they had not added any new partners to their ACP program. Five districts have forged additional partnerships with businesses, one of which developed a business advisory team, and another engaged in a program that allows high school students to gain authentic work experience along a number of different career strands. Another district added three area hospitals to their healthcare career pathway program. Two interviewees mentioned getting involved with area Inspire partnerships, one county-wide and one regionally organized, and another district reported creating new partnerships with area colleges. One respondent described attending a county-wide manufacturing group, but reported that it was

“hard to go to those meetings because they beat up on schools saying we’re not doing enough. Plus it’s expensive and kids can’t be out of school. Teachers and counselors from all over said, ‘[the manufacturers] need to back off, it’s not helping those relationships.’”

*ACP software use*

Interviewees were also asked about the extent of their use of Career Cruising or other software. Eight districts were using Career Cruising with students, with some districts having used it for several years, and others just beginning to onboard students. Most districts who gave access to students had also given access to teachers, but one district was still onboarding teachers and doing professional development around it while using it with students. One district was still onboarding teachers and had not yet given access to students. Two districts mentioned that more staff professional development was needed. One district had given access to parents, but discovered there were glitches and decided to temporarily “back off the parent portal” until the problems were addressed; their secretary, who was reported to be spending “several hours a day” on Career Cruising, was also tasked with fielding parent questions about the portal and it was too much work for her. Another district described having to “rein in the students” because teachers reported that sixth-grade students were “really excited about it” and were “very engaged” but the district did not have sufficient time allotted for the activities. Consequently, this district was adjusting some of their plans to address that issue. Finally, one district was testing both Career Cruising and another product, and was having difficulty deciding which to use, as each, they reported, had its various strengths and weaknesses. This respondent reported that Career Cruising was “very weak on assessments for kids” but that the other system had “some issues with attaching documents and being able to build that portfolio for kids.” The interviewee reported that the district planned to make a decision on software by February.

*Additional Feedback*

Interviewees were also given the opportunity to express any additional feedback they had about their ACP work. Most had little to add, but several expressed ideas on a number of topics. One interviewee reported that she would “love to know how many other school districts are looking at creating ACP school coordinator positions at the district level.” Another reported that the ACP updates from DPI were “overwhelming,” reporting that “most staff don’t look at them, there are too many links” although this respondent did not know what a solution to this would be. One interviewee expressed a desire for a place for districts to collaborate and “easily access examples. Something similar to the Google Drive that existed for the pilot districts.” Given the existence of the Google+ community, perhaps DPI needs to increase efforts to promote this resource. Finally, several respondents again mentioned the value of having an annual ACP conference, and reported that teams need more time to collaborate at conferences. This respondent believed that doing so approximated one of the values of participating in the pilot, which was “getting time to talk to other districts.” Another interviewee summed up the value of the ACP conference very succinctly, saying, “The areas where we’re weak we can learn; the areas where we’re strong we can share.”

**Conclusion**

Although these 10 districts who had participated in the ACP pilot year worked in a variety of contexts, created and implemented plans in various ways, and met different challenges, they are similar in that they are all progressing with the plan, or a version of it, that they put in place during the pilot year. Although they listed several challenges, they tended to report that their successes outweighed their challenges, and that, as a whole, they were progressing well. Caution should be taken, however, if generalizing these findings beyond these 10 districts, as we cannot assume that the other former pilot districts are all enjoying similar outcomes. Nonetheless, these districts report progress, appreciation for the resources that DPI provides, and growing enthusiasm for the initiative, showing that DPI’s efforts in rolling out Academic and Career Planning are bearing fruit. The evaluation team will further explore many of these findings with the remaining data collection in this year’s study to develop a deeper understanding of both the successes and challenges being met by districts.