

# Preface

My interest in the nature and promise of individualized learning plans (ILPs) began as an eighteen-month research project and grew into an eleven-year study. Over the past decade, I have been fortunate to watch ILPs steadily emerge as a core strategy for helping states graduate all youth college and career ready. As I write this book, forty-two states have either mandated or strongly encouraged the adoption of ILPs. This book tries to translate what my colleagues and I learned as we engaged in research, technical assistance, and policy development to support states, districts, and schools around the country.

From what I have witnessed, I truly believe that ILPs have the power to harness student potential in ways we have never before seen in education. The biggest challenge to successful implementation has not been dollars or resources, but imagination. In response, this book tries to shape our collective imagination about the nature of ILPs and outline what is possible if we work together to design and implement a quality ILP program—one that emphasizes a process of skill-building centered on, but going far beyond, the assembly of a document or e-portfolio.

Specifically, ILP programs enable youth to develop the skills to navigate their own academic learning in ways that prepare them to pursue a range of career and life goals. At the school level, this means youth commit to learning and school outcome indicators subsequently rise. At the personal level, it means youth matriculate into postsecondary opportunities with the skills and determination to successfully complete training or degree programs and move into high-paying occupations. While you might find these outcomes hard to imagine now, I hope after reading this book you will begin to believe otherwise.