

Decision Brief: Require Expanded Career Exposure, Exploration, and Planning

Background

Pursuant to legislation from the 2009 General Assembly, the Board of Education amended the *Standards of Accreditation* (SOA) provisions for each middle and high school student to have a personal learning plan that aligns academic and career goals with the student's course of study. The requirement was subsequently delayed for three years. The requirement is as follows:

Beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year, all schools shall begin development of a personal Academic and Career Plan (ACP) for each seventh-grade student with completion by the fall of the student's eighth-grade year. Students who transfer from other than a Virginia public school into the eighth-grade shall have the Plan developed as soon as practicable following enrollment. The components of the Plan shall include, but not be limited to, the student's program of study for high school graduation and a postsecondary career pathway based on the student's academic and career interests. The ACP shall be developed in accordance with [guidelines](#) established by the Board of Education and signed by the student, student's parent or guardian, and school official(s) designated by the principal. The Plan shall be included in the student's record and shall be reviewed and updated, if necessary, before the student enters the ninth and eleventh grades.

Proposal for Consideration

As the Board develops a Profile of a Graduate, the Board is asked to consider enhancing the language of the Academic and Career Plan requirement in the SOA to include more specific language related to career exposure, exploration, and planning. As a component of the enhanced policy, consider including content deliverables to students at critical decision-making stages in the K-12 school experience, and require that all students take a career investigation course in middle school.

Explanation

The current ACP language is broad. To ensure students are receiving the best information to make informed decisions about their future, it is proposed that a policy change be made to add new language to the ACP requirement to include critical decision-making points in elementary school, middle school, and high school. The language could include requiring students to select a career cluster area(s) in elementary, a career pathway designation(s) in middle (according to the results of a locally selected career interest inventory), and choosing a career-related experience for high school. The language would also specify the importance of this Plan being student-led, family-engaged, and with the opportunity for revisions and edits as the student progresses through each level.

The course [Career Investigation \(9070\)](#) currently exists and exposes students to career clusters, pathways, work-based learning opportunities, an interest inventory, information on the labor market, as well as a process for completing the ACP. The course is designed for middle school students. The curriculum was created with input from teachers, school counselors, and business and industry and would provide consistency and continuity for students at a critical decision-making time in their educational experience. To incentivize this for students, the 18 or 36 week courses completed in middle school could award high school credit.

Advantages of Action

- Create a formalized approach to academic and career planning and streamline the process to ensure certain critical information is being shared with students as they make decisions and move from elementary to middle to high school.
- Professional development on the ACP has been ongoing with school counselors since 2009 through face-to-face regional workshops, conference sessions, webinars, and video streaming sessions.

- The requirement for all students to take the Career Investigation course ensures that all students are receiving the necessary information on career clusters, pathways, and course planning to create a meaningful ACP in a consistent manner.
- The Career Investigation course embeds the [Workplace Readiness Skills](#) that are critical for students, and align well with the “5 C’s” needed for success in life. It allows school counselors to work collaboratively with teachers to teach the content. The course serves not only as a tool for students for career development and further education, but also serves as a platform to support and inform students of the new information and expectations around the Profile of a Graduate.

Considerations

- Professional development for school counselors and teachers will need to increase and envelop the ongoing work around the Profile of a Graduate. Areas of new training will also focus on comprehensive and developmental school counseling programs.
- An effort will need to be made to shift current mindsets regarding the ACP being a school-counselor specific duty. This work needs to encompass the entire school.
- An effort will need to be made to provide school administrators with the proper information on the role of the licensed professional school counselor so they can best utilize the skills and training of school counselors to assist in the ACP development.

Legislation/SOL Innovations Committee Recommendations to Consider

In its Fall 2015 Report, the SOL Innovations Committee noted the need to provide resources to school divisions for specialists/coaches and counseling services at the middle and high school levels to assist with transitions and students’ selection of career pathways. The Committee included the following recommendation: *“High schools should be redesigned so that students move from attaining core knowledge and skills in the early years to one of several alternative paths toward college and career readiness.”*

Stakeholder Summary

- Counselors noted they are already doing career planning and it is an important part of graduation readiness, but there are logistical hurdles to doing it effectively. One the biggest hurdles is time given the current counselor to student ratios and non-counseling duties often assigned to counselors. The state’s backing is needed in defining the role of professional school counselors and their expertise in career development and social emotional development. Counselors also noted the need to collaborate with teachers to share time/access to students, and time to work with teachers so they can reinforce the lessons and skills.
- Teachers, principals, superintendents, and parents echoed similar sentiments regarding the role of school counselors and the need to lower the counselor to student ratios.
- Educators also reiterated the need to begin career exposure, exploration, and planning at an early age.

Actions from Other States

Several states require educational plans to be developed for each student prior to beginning high school. Georgia, Washington, Michigan, and Colorado each have state requirements for plans to be created by the 8th grade and updated “regularly,” although how often is not specified at the state level. New Mexico’s requirement mandates that a plan must be made yearly, beginning in 8th grade. Rhode Island and Oregon both require plans be made by 6th and 7th grade respectively. Many states also have career clusters or pathways that give students examples of course selections that align with different career paths.

NEXT STEP

- Accept for Immediate Inclusion (First Review in June)
- Approve, but Not Ready for the Initial Phase
- Reject