

DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR CAREER EXPLORATION AND THE ACADEMIC AND CAREER PLAN (ACP)

September 26, 2024

INTRODUCTION

The vision of the Virginia Department of Education is to create an excellent system of public education that prepares every Virginian for success. To ensure this happens, the Virginia Board of Education approved the School Performance and Support Framework in August of 2024, including the High School portion of the School Performance and Support Framework that increases the focus on readiness, with preparing students for life after high school a key outcome of high school performance. The 3E Readiness focuses on students graduating high school ready for employment, enlistment, and/or enrollment. Schools will attain points for students that meet defined expectations across employment (i.e., high demand industry-recognized credentials), enlistment (i.e., scores on a military assessment), and enrollment (i.e., dual credit or credit-bearing coursework).

For students to graduate ready, schools must support students throughout their K-12 educational journey in understanding their interests and abilities that align to a plan after graduation. As such, the Virginia Standards of Accreditation (8VAC20-132) includes provisions requiring each elementary, middle, and high school to “provide for the identification by all students of personal interests and abilities to support planning for postsecondary opportunities and career preparation.” The support required by 8VAC20-132-140 includes the exploration of career cluster areas, which lead to the development of an Academic and Career Plan Portfolio (ACPP) in elementary school and an Academic Career Plan (ACP) in middle and high school.

The Academic Career Portfolio and Plan provide a framework that allows school leaders to log the experiences and outcomes of students through the career exploration programming designed at the school level. Middle school students are required by law to complete a career interest inventory and select a career pathway. They must complete a career investigations course which includes planning for academic courses, work-based learning opportunities, completion of industry certifications, independent projects, and postsecondary education. Students must develop an ACP beginning in seventh grade and completion by the end of the fall semester in eighth grade. Per Board regulations, the ACP is signed by the student, student’s parent or guardian, and school official; reviewed and updated annually; and is included in the student’s record.

The 3E Readiness and academic career planning process are tightly connected to set up all Virginia students for success after graduation. This document interprets and implements the Virginia Standards of Accreditation (8VAC20-132) by helping define “career exploration” and provides guidance for public schools to develop and implement ACPs.

CAREER EXPLORATION: DRAFT DEFINITION

Career exploration includes a K-12 progression of exploring careers, skill sets, and attributes for careers as well personal strengths, skills, and interests. Exploration includes meaningful experiences where students are learning in workplace environments to help them understand “what work is”. It also provides opportunities for learning about different occupations, the local and regional demand and wage of available occupations, and how to meaningfully prepare for those occupations. Exploration allows students to evaluate and match career skill sets to one’s own interests, strengths, and skills. Career exploration must continuously include efforts to engage business, workforce, postsecondary systems, and families to provide resources, education, and access to all students.

K-5 Career Exploration

Student exploration should be grounded within core content areas and in concrete exploration of all nationally- and state-recognized career clusters. It should foster development of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, citizenship, and creative thinking (5 Cs). This includes the relationship between personal qualities, education, training, and the world of work as well as how the 5Cs are key components to work-readiness. Schools should consider administering a developmentally appropriate interest inventory. These activities should be used to develop an ACPP.

Students will be expected to demonstrate mastery of the 5Cs with the fifth-grade performance task of the statewide Standards of Learning assessment. For more information on the 5Cs, visit the [Commonwealth Learning Partnership](#) for concrete career exploration models in the 5Cs.

Grades 6-8 Career Exploration

Student exploration during grades 6-8 should be deeply focused on career clusters. All students should:

- Explore varied career categories and the post-secondary learning experiences that would be required for several different types of high-demand jobs within a cluster.
- Explore 3E Readiness experiences available at high school.
- Complete a career interest inventory and how those interests match the career clusters that results in selecting a career pathway of interest.
- Understand the importance of academic success, 5Cs as workforce readiness skills, higher education opportunities, military career pathways, and career training centers.
- Complete at least one full-day, concrete job shadowing experience in a career cluster of interest.

These explorations should be included in the student’s ACP with demonstration of all 5Cs and career exploration experiences through the end of middle school. In addition, middle schools should provide flexible, competency-based learning opportunities to ensure students can

maximize the 3E Readiness opportunities in high schools, including opportunities for accelerated high school coursework to provide space in the high school schedule to engage in aligned coursework and practical experiences. Students should be provided resources and exposure to scholarship, grant, and financial aid opportunities to engage in pathway opportunities.

The Department strongly encourages middle schools to provide family engagement opportunities as students are exploring career pathways and developing their ACP. Hosting a career exploration night is one strategy in which families can explore career clusters, the Virginia Office of Education Economics' high-demand jobs list, potential earnings of careers within each cluster, and FAFSA or other scholarships and grants. These opportunities allow families to engage in their child's career exploration and support the career planning process.

Grades 9-12 Career Exploration

High school exploration and coursework should be aligned to the 3E Readiness. This includes understanding the high-demand and industry-recognized pathways, advanced college-bearing coursework, and military career pathways in grades 9 and 10. Grades 11 and 12 should include concrete experiences and high-quality work-based learning in one or more of the three readiness areas.

Students' 3E Readiness experiences should result in measurable outcomes through the high school experience that include seamless pathways to sustainable employment in high-wage, high-demand careers.

Students should have competency-based learning opportunities and flexible learning pathways that focus on:

- Coursework and experiences that prepare the student for college-level studies including access to at least three Advanced Placement (AP) courses, college-level courses for degree credit through dual enrollment, International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, Cambridge courses, or any combination thereof; and/or
- High-demand career and technical education exploration courses that incorporate knowledge of regional workforce needs and opportunities, and/or
- High-demand career and technical education program completion pathways that ensure readiness in one of three or more occupational areas and that provide the student with industry-recognized credentials necessary for the career field of their choice.

ACADEMIC AND CAREER PLANNING K-12 PROGRESSION

Beginning in the 2018-2019 school year, the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) require 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.

This requires that each elementary, middle, and secondary school shall ensure that all students identify personal interests and abilities to support planning for postsecondary opportunities and career preparation. Such support shall include exploration of career cluster areas in elementary schools, course information for college preparation programs, opportunities for educational and academic experiences in and outside the classroom (e.g., internships and work-based learning), and the multiple pathways to college and career readiness in middle and high school.

In August of 2024, the Virginia Board of Education approved the School Performance and Support Framework, including the High School portion of the School Performance and Support Framework that increases the focus on readiness, with preparing students for life after high school a key outcome of high school performance. The [3E Readiness](#) focuses on students graduating high school ready for **employment, enlistment, and/or enrollment**. Schools will attain points for students that meet defined expectations across employment (i.e., high demand industry-recognized credentials), enlistment (i.e., scores on a military assessment), and enrollment (i.e., dual credit or credit-bearing coursework). Schools can attain points across all three framework components. The goal of the 3E Readiness is to ensure every Virginia student graduates high school having earned at least one set of measurable experiences that include a high-demand industry recognized credential for employment, high-rigor military preparation as outlined in the outcome-based measures for enlistment, and/or transferable post-secondary credits (either through dual enrollment or accelerated, rigorous college credit-bearing coursework) for enrollment. (Student experiences should meet the Tier I and Tier II experiences outlined in the 3E Readiness). This framework allows K-12 students to engage in seamless pathways to sustainable employment in high-wage, high demand careers post-graduation.

The templates for the ACPP used in elementary school and the ACP used in middle and high school below have a list of competencies for students as they progress through K-12. School leaders log the experiences and outcomes for each competency which documents that ensure every Virginia child has experiences that produce demonstrated outcomes through the career exploration programming designed at the school level.

Elementary School Academic Career Portfolio		
Supported Competencies	Student Activity	Work Product/Outcome
Understanding of work and why people work		
Concrete explorations of the Career Clusters		
Identify and develop 5Cs as workplace readiness skills	<i>The Five Cs include critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, and citizenship skills. Through application of these concepts across academic disciplines, students should practice these skills within class activities.</i>	5 th Grade Performance Task
Develop awareness of Education Pathways and Training Exploration		
Personal Interest and Skills Assessment	Developmentally appropriate interest inventory	
Begin to develop an actionable academic career plan portfolio	Learn about advanced middle school course offerings and their potential benefit to pathway engagement	

Middle School Academic Career Plan***The ACP must be developed beginning in 7th grade and completed by the end of the fall semester of 8th grade.**

Supported Competencies	Activity	Work Product/Outcome
Narrow career cluster and interests and understand post-secondary learning pathways for career interests	e.g., complete interest inventory, job shadow experience	Updated ACP
Understanding of importance of academic success and consider competency-based learning demonstration	e.g., tracking academic course work and personal competencies	
Explore higher education and career training centers		
Explore 3E Readiness		Updated ACP Performance Task
Introduction to VOEE high-demand, high-wage occupation list for course and experience planning for employment pathways		
Parent Planning		
Ready for Life exposure to financial literacy		

High School Academic Career Plan: 9th Grade/10th Grade		
Supported Competencies	Activity	Work Product/Outcome
Clear 4-year pathway and course map	e.g., counselor-student (and family if possible) intake meeting to plan course pathway inclusive of competency-based learning, higher education courses, and/or industry recognized pathway using the VOEE high-demand jobs list	ACP Scheduling Map
Family Readiness and Fiscal Planning		Complete collaborative plan Practice FAFSA, scholarship, career training grant, and other potential applications
Manage Academic Success and Tracking of competency-based learning		On Track Course Completion
Understand Financial Resources		Financial Planning Map
Awareness of Post-Secondary Opportunities		On-site visits to postsecondary institutions, varied career worksites, and military sites

High School Academic Career Plan: 11th Grade/12th Grade		
Supported Competencies	Activity	Work Product/Outcome
Ensure academic planning	e.g., complete 11 th /12 th grade scheduling including tracking academic needs and competency-based opportunities that ensure college coursework and/or industry recognized CTE pathways	
Manage Academic Success and Tracking of competency-based learning	e.g., counselor check-ins on ACP	
	e.g., complete family post-secondary planning and FAFSA	FAFSA/Scholarship Planning
	e.g., high-quality work-based learning experiences goal: apprenticeship/internship Campus	
Ensure outcome measures are complete		
	Transition planning	