

Decision Brief: Applied Knowledge and Skills Credential

Background

An Applied Knowledge and Skills credential would document understanding and demonstrated application on the part of a student of academic content through use and of attaining the personal attributes categorized as the 5 C's: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and citizenship. Previous Board of Education discussions, presentations before the Board's accountability committee, comments from stakeholder roundtables, recommendations from the Standards of Learning Innovations Committee, and legislation adopted through the 2016 General Assembly session have referenced demonstrated learning of academic content and development of life readiness skills as necessary components of graduation requirements in order to prepare students.

Proposal for Consideration

As the Board develops a Profile of a Graduate, it is asked to consider incorporating an Applied Knowledge and Skills credential which may be earned by demonstrated competency in each of the 5 C's and within the domains established by the Board: Content Knowledge, Career Planning, Community and Civic Engagement, and Workplace Skills. These competencies could be developed and demonstrated through alternative methods, for example, through coursework, or through individual projects, outside school experiences, or internships. The competencies would be verified by the local school division.

Explanation

The 5 C's will not be learned by students on their own. Attainment requires deliberate instruction, experience, and practice. Competencies in each of the 5 C's will be evaluated by school divisions, according to Board of Education guidelines, and documented through the Academic and Career Plan, beginning in middle school. The student's plan should include work-based experiences, internships, independent studies, student projects, and other opportunities planned to achieve the competencies.

Advantages of Action

- Using academic content in an applied context which depends on student personal skills for success reinforces learning and helps students understand the relevance of courses for career choices and plans for life after high school.
- Institutions of higher education and employers from all sectors have emphasized the need for students to be able to think critically and problem solve, and the importance of understanding how to communicate and work with others.

Considerations

- Definitions of the competencies and descriptions of criteria for evaluation would need to be developed. The Board and Department would develop guidelines for the awarding of credentials, including suggested measures of attainment for school divisions to use.
- Professional development would need to be provided to support implementation.

Legislation/SOL Innovations Committee Recommendations to Consider

Legislation approved by the 2016 General Assembly and Governor ([HB 895](#) Greason) requires the Board of Education to develop and implement, in consultation with stakeholders, a Profile of a Graduate that *"identifies the knowledge and skills that students should attain during high school in order to be successful contributors to the economy of the Commonwealth, giving due consideration to critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship..."*

In its Fall 2015 Report, the SOL Innovations Committee recommended that *“in the development of such a Profile, the Board should consider the “5 Cs” – critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship – needed for success in the New Virginia Economy.”* This recommendation piggybacks on its 2014 recommendation that *“the Board of Education consider revisions to the Standards of Learning that give attention to the skills deemed important for success in college, career, and citizenship. Such a focus suggests that content standards will be fewer and deeper and will reflect increased emphasis on essential skills in areas such as communication, problem solving, and critical and creative thinking at the high levels needed for success beyond school.”*

Stakeholder Summary

Discussions with stakeholders have indicated they are supportive of a means to certify student demonstration of applied knowledge and skills, but there are questions about how to measure such skills.

- Superintendents expressed support for applied skills and knowledge—to include social-emotional, ethics, intergroup dynamics, and positively working together, and noted a shift to more authentic and project--based learning experiences where students demonstrate and apply their knowledge and skills.
- Counselors noted the need for transferable “soft” skills, which are lacking in some students. They reiterated the need to integrate instruction of academic content along with soft skills together.
- Principals reiterated that many students are not exposed to the soft skills needed to succeed in post-secondary education, career, and life. Some schools are moving to more problem-based learning and capstone projects which demonstrate these skills.
- Teachers noted that applied skills are needed, but expressed concern regarding when they are taught given engrained importance of SOL testing.
- Educators noted that not all qualities desired can be measured.
- Parents noted the importance of applied knowledge and skills, but acknowledged that not all parents have the skills to teach those skills. It was also questioned when this instruction will occur in the school day.

Actions from other States

Oregon has developed nine essential skills for graduates, but only three are required at this time. South Carolina has redesigned the profile of a South Carolina graduate which focuses on three major areas: World Class Knowledge, World Class Skill, and Life and Career Characteristics. Connecticut recommends localities develop competencies, referred to as a Mastery-based Learning system, but it is not a statewide requirement.

In Kentucky, a high school graduation credit may be awarded through performance-based credits outside of the traditional structure of a 120-hour instructional course – in order to award such credits, local districts must establish policy for a performance-based system that meets certain statewide criteria.

NEXT STEP

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