

Decision Brief: Develop Career-Specific Courses/Competencies within Traditional Credit Areas

Background

Virginia middle school programs support early planning for college and careers. Starting in grade 7, students/families and schools collaborate to create Academic and Career Plans. Middle school students can take a CTE course [Career Investigation Phase I](#) which provides opportunities to explore careers and work force opportunities. At the secondary level, Virginia's CTE courses include [Workplace Readiness Skills](#).

Various stakeholder groups want to explore ways to plan a more explicit approach by developing career-specific focus courses. This could be done through secondary courses or modules within the traditional credit areas.

Proposal for Consideration

As the Board develops a Profile of a Graduate, it is asked to consider creating and offering courses (or modules) in traditional, core, content areas that are career specific.

Explanation

Currently, every student is required to earn four standard graduation credits in English by taking English 9, 10, 11, and 12. With this proposal students may be able to take a technical reading/writing course versus one of the traditional English courses.

To earn one of the four mathematics credits needed under the "strawman" Virginia Diploma, students in the Architecture and Construction Career Cluster might take Construction Math while students in the Marketing Cluster might take Business and Economic Math.

These courses could be taken as independent courses or may be part of an integrated course in the specific career cluster.

Advantages of Action

- Developing career-specific courses or modules within or in support of the traditional credit areas will assist students understanding of opportunities upon graduation.
- Incorporating career topics into the core areas of instruction allows all students to connect the learning and understand the purpose behind the instruction.
- Career-specific courses keep students engaged in content areas such as mathematics throughout their entire high school career versus having students complete these credits after the ninth or tenth grade and take no math courses during their last two years of high school.

Considerations

- Although there is a plethora of information on college, careers, interdisciplinary coursework, citizenship development, and work force readiness, it is organized into different areas. Developing career-specific courses for all career clusters would take time.
- Capacity of schools and divisions to offer courses should also be considered.

Legislation/SOL Innovations Committee Recommendations to Consider

In its Fall 2015 Report, the SOL Innovations Committee recommended that the Board of Education and the Department “*should undertake the redesign of the current high school model, so that students spend the early high school years developing core skill sets, and the later years following one of several alternative paths toward college and career readiness (e.g., internships/apprenticeships, early college, career readiness, certifications, a student portfolio that demonstrates mastery of essential skills).*”

There is already a requirement for an Academic and Career Plan in the *Standards of Accreditation* (SOA). It is possible to build off of this language to include specific expectations about adding career exploration in the K-12 experience.

Stakeholder Summary

- Counselors, teachers, principals, and parents generally supported the broadening of courses (as opposed to the linear progression currently) to include career-specific courses or modules. They noted it may engage students more, and make instruction relevant. Creating these career-specific courses could afford an opportunity to build the 5C’s and other universal competencies into the curriculum.
- Stakeholders did express concerns/questions about how this would work in our current system (scheduling and staff considerations) and with SOL assessments.

NEXT STEP

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