

POSITION STATEMENT ON A REQUIRED CAREER INVESTIGATIONS COURSE

The Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education (VCFAE), while realizing that we in the Commonwealth of Virginia need to better prepare our students for success in 21st century post-secondary learning and career preparation, does not support the proposed requirement of a stand-alone career investigations course to be required of all middle school students.

As outlined in the *Progress Report on the Board of Education's Development of a Profile of a Virginia Graduate*, the course, entitled Career Investigation Phase I could take the form of a 9-week exploratory or an 18- or 36-week high school credit class. Students would "assess their roles in society, identify their roles as workers, analyze their personal assets, complete an exploration of career clusters and pathways, select career fields or occupations for further study, demonstrate Workplace Readiness Skills (Personal, Professional, and Technical), and create an Academic and Career Plan based on their interests, values, and skills."

The VCFAE has concerns related to the implementation of this requirement:

- The middle school schedule currently is crowded, allows few electives, and leaves little time for students to explore personal interests. Requiring this course would further intrude on that exploration, leaving little time for students to experience the range of choices available to them. The course, then, would be a survey of career options which would take the place of actual experience in related fields.
- For the students who have selected to pursue interests which require sequential and cumulative practice, for example band or foreign language, this course, by using elective time slots, could inhibit preparation in a chosen field.
- We have advocated for a graduation requirement of one credit in the Fine Arts as a part of this revision. However, if the new requirements can still be met by one credit in either the Fine Arts or CTE, then taking the proposed one credit career preparation course could fulfill that requirement taking the place of study in the arts or technology.
- Implementing the required course necessitates full staffing which could have a negative impact on funding in other disciplines.
- Many subject areas have Standards of Learning which, beginning in the earliest grades, address careers. Teachers who have content knowledge in disciplines are more likely to facilitate in-depth exploration of career opportunities in that subject than the teacher of a survey course in careers.
- The planning of careers and course work designed to support career pathways, is best addressed through each school's counseling department.

Finally, study and practice in the visual and performing arts are aligned with the goals of the new graduation requirements, prepare students for the twenty-first century and facilitate growth directly aligned with the 5C's. R. Benjamin Knapp Director of the Institute for Creativity, Arts, And Technology (ICAT) at Virginia Tech, maintains that, "Creativity is essential in everything we do. Cultivating creativity, on all kinds of levels, flexes our thinking, opens us up to growth, and motivates us." In addition to the inherent benefits of the skills, knowledge, and understandings gained through participation in dance, music, theater, and the visual arts, students involved in the arts develop creative problem solving skills, exercise perseverance and persistence, work collaboratively, and take responsibility for learning independently, all of which are necessary for college and career readiness. As rapid change in the twenty-first century work force and career opportunities is a constant, these skills become ever more critical and enable future workers to adapt to ever-shifting circumstances. The VCFAE supports student acquisition of 21st century skills and exploration of career opportunities as an integral part of actual research and practice in relevant subject area classes rather than the imposition of an additional required course.

Contact: Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education
John H. Brewington, Chairperson
Jbrewington4@gmail.com

Statement supported by: Virginia Art Education Association
Virginia Music Education Association
Virginia Theatre Association