



## DEFINITIONS & GOVERNANCE: Middle School Career Exploration Definitions & Governance

*This draft policy offers a model that can be adopted in whole or part for those states seeking a complete set of policies to guide their middle school career exploration work. It codifies the definitions for middle school career exploration and associated state roles and responsibilities to signal the state's commitment to the provision of career exploration opportunities to middle school students. Depending on your state's governance structure, this policy may be passed through the legislative process (e.g., in statute and code) or through state board rulemaking. This language can be adapted to fit either context to codify middle school career exploration in the state's expectations.*

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Be it enacted by the (*governing body*) of (*State*):

### Section 1. Definitions

- (1) "Career exploration activity" means any educational programming, activity, or event that provides early exposure to jobs and industries and creates links between what students learn in school and their emerging career interests.
  - (a) Career exploration experiences should be varied, personalized, real-world, and hands-on. Opportunities should be aligned to individual student interests, with clear connections to durable or professional skills, careers that are aligned to the changing future of workforce needs, and to upcoming transitions to high school.
  - (b) Career exploration activities may include without limitation activities designed to immerse students in experiences that provide an understanding of various in-demand career fields including but not limited to field trips, guest speakers, community service, job-shadows, career fairs, interviews, research projects, project-based learning, internships, and work-based learning.
- (2) "Department" means the (*State*) Department of Education.
- (3) "Durable skills", sometimes referred to as "professional skills" means attributes that demonstrate a student's propensity for success in a workplace, which often includes a

combination of how students use skills like critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity – as well as character skills like fortitude, growth mindset, and leadership.

- (4) “Individual Career and Academic Plan” or “ICAP” means a plan that is developed by the student in collaboration with their parents/caregivers and school personnel that is reviewed and updated annually beginning in the fifth grade.<sup>1</sup> The plan should guide students’ educational and career pathway choices, such as course selection, activity participation, and postsecondary planning, to prepare students for success after high school, and should adapt to the student’s changing interests, goals or career aspirations, as needed.
- (5) “Intermediary” means any organization that connects education systems and employers to design and deliver career exploration programming that creates opportunities for students to engage in the world of work.
- (6) “Local Education Agency”, also referred to as “school district” means a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within (*State*) for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of (*State*).
- (7) “Middle school” means a school consisting of grades five through eight (5-8) or any combination that includes grades five through eight (5-8). Middle schools serve children who are approximately 10-14 years of age.<sup>2</sup>
- (8) “Middle school career exploration” means any activity that allows students to develop an awareness of all career fields as defined by (*national or state career frameworks*) and investigate their own interests and aptitudes related to careers.<sup>3</sup> Students gain a deeper understanding of career interests and related occupations to obtain the information needed to make connections between their education and career aspirations in order to make a plan for reaching their future goals.
- (9) “Social Capital” means the relationships and networks one has and the ability to leverage these connections for information and opportunities such as career advice, mentorship, internships, resources, and job interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> States can use the starting grade that best meets their definition for middle school.

<sup>2</sup> States can adjust this grade band to fit their middle grades definition

<sup>3</sup> States can use the National Career Clusters<sup>®</sup> Framework or state-specific career cluster frameworks as a guideline to introduce students to a variety of career paths.

## Section 2. Middle School Career Exploration


- (1) To prepare students for choosing a career field and planning their educational training, each public school district and charter school serving middle school students shall incorporate career exploration activities that expose students to careers of interest.
  - (a) Each public school district and charter school shall annually provide a minimum of six (6) career awareness and exploration activities for each student in grades five through eight (5-8).
  - (b) Career exploration activities shall
    - (i) provide students with opportunities to assess their skills, interests, and aptitudes in an authentic way through personal experiences and interest inventories to determine how those align with various career paths. These results shall be used to create a living plan to inform future education courses and experiences, including the provision of additional career exploration experiences;
    - (ii) include exposure to various durable or professional skills needed to be successful in any career field;
    - (iii) allow students to learn content and practice skills that help them build their social capital;
    - (iv) be documented in an individual career and academic plan pursuant to (*state law, rule, or regulation*) that follows students to high school through graduation.<sup>4</sup>
- (2) Each school district shall facilitate partnerships with community organizations and agencies, municipal entities, and businesses to identify and recruit employers to provide and support career exploration activities for middle school students.<sup>5</sup>
- (3) The provision of career exploration activities shall not be dependent upon student participation in career and technical education courses, honors or advanced academies, and/or after-school programming.

## Section 3. Department Roles and Responsibilities.

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<sup>4</sup> States should reference the appropriate policy language that reflects their student academic and career planning requirements.

<sup>5</sup> See the policy language reflected in Establishing Intermediary Support for Middle School Career Exploration for specific requirements for partnering with intermediaries.

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- (1) The Department will issue guidance annually on specific middle school career exploration activities that are considered age-appropriate and scaffolded to support students and their families.
    - (a) The Department shall designate a contact to assist districts with the provision of career exploration experiences at the middle school level, ensuring alignment with individual career and academic planning policies and state academic standards.
  - (4) The Department shall coordinate with the (*State*) Workforce Agency to ensure middle school career exploration efforts align with statewide workforce priorities.
  - (5) The Department shall partner with state, regional, and local intermediaries to build capacity at the district level for successful provision of middle school career exploration opportunities.
  - (6) Pursuant to (*state law, rule, or regulation*), the Department has the authority to promulgate rules to implement this section.