

**Question:** How can state policy support school reform efforts that create learning environments relevant to the social, economic, and global workforce realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Group Recommendation:** All School districts must ensure their graduates have met the Career and Education Work Standards as mandated in Chapter 4 of the Pennsylvania School Code.

### **Policy Group Members**

Sally DeFinnis-Principal  
Salem Elementary School  
Berwick Area School District

Jean Kelleher-Manager/Program Standards and Quality Assurance  
PDE-Bureau of Career and Technical Education  
Harrisburg

Cindy Klenk-Senior Policy Advisor  
Pennsylvania State Senator Blake  
Harrisburg

Michele M. Orner, Ed.D.-Director  
Center for Careers and Technology-Carlisle Area School District  
Carlisle

Leah Spangler-Executive Director  
The Learning Lamp  
Johnstown

Danielle Mehalick-Business Manager/Board Secretary  
Greater Altoona Career and Technology Center  
Altoona

Francie Spigelmyer, Ph.D.-Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Butler County Community College  
Butler

## **Introduction**

Are we confident that our children are making the proper connection between fundamental learning and its application in the jobs that await them in the global market? Of most importance facing the nation today is to find ways to improve education and learning for all young people and to ensure that no one lacks genuine opportunities to develop the skills and competencies they will need to succeed in higher education, the workplace and lifelong learning. Schools, businesses and other community organizations can change the education experience and enrich the lives of our students.

Under Chapter 4, Title 22 (Education) of the Pennsylvania School Code, K-12 career, Education and Work (CEW) Standards are to be implemented in every school district in the Commonwealth. Despite this, many districts do not have a K-12 CEW plan or have addressed the standards in a haphazard fashion. School leaders cite the increasing number of mandates, testing and waning resources as primary reasons for this failure.

Without proper career development, we have a generation of students without a career focus with numerous employment shifting and college ‘major’ hopping. Ineffectual transitioning from secondary to post-secondary and work will cost employers millions in training and re-training. There are several recommendations that would ensure the implementation of the PA Career Education and Work Standards and prepare all students for college and career readiness; Business-Ed Partnerships/Advisory Council, Implementation of a Comprehensive Guidance Plan, a K-12 Career Counselor in every School District...however, there are some money considerations upon implementation.

**Recommendations;** The consistency of the Implementation and Accountability of the Career, Education and Work Standards among all Pennsylvania Public Schools. There needs to be a commitment for and a focus on *Student Preparedness and Achievement, Stakeholder Engagement and Fiscal Responsibility.*

Academic Standards for Career Education and Workforce, (CEW), can be found in the PA Education Code, Chapter 4, Appendix E. The Department of Education CEW is part of the State Board of Education’s regulation of required education. Pennsylvania’s economic future depends on having a well educated and skilled workforce. It is a commitment of Pennsylvania that no student should leave secondary education without a solid foundation in Career, Education and Work.

Pennsylvania requires **all** school districts to have a K-12 Counseling Plan as part of Chapter 339. In Chapter 339.31; *There shall be a written plan on file, approved by the local board of school directors, so the development and implementation of a comprehensive, sequential program of guidance service for Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.* The PA CEW website lists *Thirteen Effective Practices* for implementing the standards as well as the PA Department of Education has funded consultants that are available to work with groups of school districts to develop and implement a K-12 Counseling Plan and Program Resources. Despite this many districts do not have a K-12CEW plan or have addressed the standards in a haphazard fashion.

There are identified stages of Career Development linked to the CEW Standards. **Fantasy**, Birth to 10 yrs., grades K-4, this is an awareness phase this is an important time for lighting the spark in all children. **Interest**, 11-12 years of age, grades 5-6, which involves awareness and exploration. **Capacity**, 13-14 years old, grades 7-8, during this stage there is a focus on exploration. **Tentative**, 15-17 years old, grades 9-11, where they are planning for their career. And the final stage, **Crystallization**, 18-21 years of age, graduation. Mike Thompson, PDE Consultant, claims that students will be able to “crystallize” a vocational preference upon graduation from high school instead of the mid 20’s.

Implementation goals for grades Kindergarten thru 5<sup>th</sup> grades would include creating opportunities based on a “Begin With the End in Mind” philosophy and the idea that individuals have unique interests. Identify a range of career opportunities and describe/experience the work done by those individuals. Identify and practice workplace skills: team work, dependability, health and safety, and use of technology. Articulate the connection between education, training and careers. Some important aspects of creating awareness; the career information needs to be embedded in the curriculum and will need to link career development to existing character education programs. Identifying champions in the school will help create connections. As part of the education experience, parents and local businesses need to be engaged, and taking field trips is very beneficial. Research toolkits can be found at [www.pacareerstandards.com](http://www.pacareerstandards.com), and lesson plans are located at [www.pdesas.org](http://www.pdesas.org).

Implementation goals for secondary grades, 7 through 12, would provide a foundation for students to understand their interests, abilities, and challenges. A personal learning plan needs to be developed for high school graduation and career pathway. Academic strengths and high school courses need to be linked to post secondary education and training. Students are aware and develop productive work habits in the classroom that will apply to the workforce. Opportunities need to be created for students to practice the career, education and work standards. Advisory Committees are established, which engage all stakeholders with a promise that all businesses will benefit for advising schools on the needs of community, region and state. Resources can be found on Pennsylvania’s Education Department website at [www.education.state.pa.us](http://www.education.state.pa.us), as well as the current list of Pennsylvania’s Business-Ed Partnerships. Build an entrepreneurship curriculum and provide opportunities for entrepreneurial thinking, facilitate integration within a variety of existing K-12 courses, while emphasizing the importance of lifelong learning and workplace skills as they apply to the world of work...these are just some of the career education opportunities for students.

*Important Considerations....*

### **Soft Skills**

Many employers hire for attitude and work ethic, and train for skill. In a 2013 survey of Colleges and Employers their priority is soft skills...ability to work on a team, the ability to make decisions and solve problems, the ability to plan, organize and prioritize work, the ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside of the organization. Learning the job specific technical skills is the easy part, it's the application that matters.

### **Emotional Intelligence Ability**

Emotional Intelligence must be considered as part of the CEW Curriculum. Communication, dependability, personal initiative, self-advocacy and team building are the essential workforce skills and the results of EQ focus and development. According to HELPGUIDE.ORG., EQ is the ability to use emotions effectively and productively. This ability allows for the identification, use, understanding and management of emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict.

Emotional Intelligence impacts many different aspects of daily life, such as behavior and interaction with others.

### **Career Counselor**

Career Counseling is often overlooked by students, institutions and parents, and could prove costly. It is sound counseling that leads to well-informed, correct career decisions. Students are under a lot of pressure--pressure to perform academically, pressure to be popular, pressure to ultimately make a good life. The one thread that touches upon all these is the choice of one's career. It is a decision that is often taken under parental or societal duress. An important piece of career counseling is to simply know what career options are available and help students to make informed decisions when choosing future studies and making career choices.

Some of the benefits of having career counselors: creating awareness of career options through assessment of interests, values and skills, relating education and training to occupations, planning for education and training, and making informed career decisions and implementing them, according to the EdITS Career Development Newsletter. Mike Thompson, Consultant to the PA Department of Education, believes career development is the process through which people come to understand themselves as they relate to the world of work and their role in it.

## **Business and Industry Partnerships**

Developing a quality talent pipeline is critical to both workforce and community. Having skilled and educated young people from school to the workplace that are well prepared and motivated to meet the demands of employers and duties of adulthood is imperative in this economic environment. Strategic partnerships between businesses and schools have a profound impact on the lives of young people and the effectiveness of schools and education, as stated in the Guiding Principles for Business and School Partnerships. Better partnership between business and education makes classroom learning relevant. It is only logical that local businesses be involved and work with the School Districts through advisory boards and career counselors to generate meaningful improvement in student achievement and promote innovation throughout the education process. Local Businesses and Industry, Chambers of Commerce, Superintendents, local unions, PTA/PTOs, and non-profits would make up the Business and Education Advisory Board, with Career Counselors playing a very important role as the connector between Business and Education.

Economically and educationally speaking, how can we afford not to provide this opportunity to all students, in all public school districts in Pennsylvania? School leaders cite the increasing number of mandates, testing, and waning resources as primary reasons for this failure. There is an importance placed on testing, with funding going to the districts with the best scores. There is a demand for the best test scores, not a demand for a successful education to graduation to future career. What if there was an importance placed on Career Education? With a commitment and vision from The Department of Education working with the Department of Labor and Industry and the Department of Community and Economic Development, focus and funding the “whole” implementation of CEW standards could be of minimal costs to School Districts, with huge returns for Pennsylvania’s students and the economy.

## **Policy Recommendations**

- Locate your champions and develop a K-12 integration team.
- Engage your stakeholders and educate them on the value of K-12 Career Development.
- Require all superintendents to have a Local Advisory Board consisting of business and industry representation based on the Chapter 339 model required for Career and Technical Education.
- Mandate all teacher education programs to require a minimum of one course where future educators engage in understanding the world of work, career development, and connecting academics to post-secondary planning.
- Embed a module of workforce and economic development for all administrators as part of the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership program.
- Find out what is happening now in your school district and look for your gaps connected with CEW standards.
- Develop action plans and set goals linked to data.
- Develop a timeline for accountability.
- Fund career focused education pilot programs.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that PA has an educational priority... ensuring that schools in the Commonwealth are effective and engaging environments for learning and personal development. It is critical for the success of all of the students and for the industries and businesses who require a motivated and talented pipeline of young people to drive innovation, and for communities that depend on a productive citizenry for their sustainability.

As Parents, Educators, Legislators, Business and Community leaders, we must realize it is a fundamental obligation to prepare adolescents and young adults to lead productive and prosperous lives, not to mention critical partners in educating young people. With proper career development, we will have students with a career focus and numerous opportunities both personally and professionally. Young people would move through a series of job experiments in their early to late twenties, costing employers and the young person time and money.

Working together, parents, businesses, schools, and the community can change the culture and character of the learning experience and enrich the lives of students. An effective education has the potential to change the life experience of a young person in ways that may not always be measurable but do have an impact, to build and to realize a vision of what is possible in their life through learning. Career focused education will lead to a successful future for all students and an economically strong nation.

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