



## Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #539

### **Academic and Career Planning (DPI -- Administrative and Other Funding)**

[LFB 2013-15 Budget Summary: Page 392, #8]

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#### **CURRENT LAW**

Current law requires each school board to provide a program of guidance and counseling services to students, which, among other requirements, must provide developmentally appropriate educational, vocational, and career information, and postsecondary planning and research.

#### **GOVERNOR**

Provide \$1,100,000 in 2014-15 in a new, continuing appropriation for implementing academic and career planning statewide. Require DPI to ensure that, beginning in 2017-18, every school board is providing academic and career planning services to pupils enrolled in grades 6 to 12 in the school district. Require DPI to procure, install, and maintain information technology, including computer software, to be used statewide by school districts to provide academic and career planning services to pupils in grades 6 to 12. Require DPI to provide guidance, training, and technical assistance to school districts and school district staff, including teachers and counselors, on how to implement model academic and career plans, including training and technical assistance that is necessary to implement the information technology provided for this purpose. Require DPI to promulgate rules to implement these provisions.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- Under current Administrative Code Chapter PI 26, each school board must provide access to an education for employment program approved by the State Superintendent, which promotes good citizenship and lifelong learning, and links academic and occupational standards to workplace skills and experiences. The program must provide information to pupils including: (a)

career awareness in the elementary grades; (b) career exploration in the middle school grades, addressing stereotyping and identifying personal preferences in relation to future work goals; and (c) career planning and preparation at the high school level, including: (1) career research including specific occupations and school supervised work based learning experiences; (2) instruction in career decision making and employability skills, including work behaviors; (3) instruction which provides for the practical application of academic skills and applied technologies; (4) the study of the practical application of economics and American economic institutions, including entrepreneurship education; and (5) pupil access to technical education programs which have a curriculum incorporating accurate national, regional, and state labor market information, including labor market supply and demand.

2. An academic and career plan is an individual plan for a pupil that assists the pupil in identifying and attaining personal academic and career goals, including identifying a sequence of courses a pupil must take to support his or her postsecondary education goals, career awareness, career exploration activities, or interest assessments. Academic and career plans (ACPs) have been advocated by several recent workgroups convened with the goal of improving college and workforce readiness among K-12 pupils. ACPs are mentioned in a report prepared by the Governor's special consultant on economic, workforce, and education development, and the Legislative Council's Special Committee on Improving Educational Opportunities in High School.

3. Some school districts and high schools already employ individual graduation plans, or individual learning plans, similar to academic and career plans. Career planning and preparation at the high school level can include instruction in employability skills, including work behaviors, as well as instruction in the practical application of academic skills and applied technologies. These strategies are intended to complement long-standing programs including part-time work experiences, youth apprenticeship, and career and technical education, which were intended to prepare students for technical college or a trade following graduation. By beginning career awareness activities as early as sixth grade, pupils may have more exposure to options for higher education or work in industries they otherwise might not have considered. Explicitly planning for postsecondary education or entry to the workforce may better prepare pupils to be successful post-high school, which is viewed as useful from an economic and workforce development standpoint.

4. In 2012, 35 states had mandated or were piloting academic and career plans. Preliminary research from other states with ACP initiatives suggest that individual learning plans, continuously developed and revised as students develop and progress, make schools more personalized, so that students are more engaged with school, aware of their individual strengths and weaknesses, and better able to select courses relevant to their career goals. There is some evidence that ACPs may help reduce the number of dropouts, engage students at risk, and improve family-school connections. Best practices suggest that a plan to implement formalized ACPs should be phased in over time, and the areas where new investments were made included professional development for school staff, and high quality ACP software that is linked to labor market data and student information systems.

5. A web-based ACP software program would include a student personal portfolio, an education plan, and a career/post-secondary plan. The portfolio can include interest inventories, personal experiences and reflections, and space to store transcripts, awards, state and local

assessment results, college and career assessment results such as Explore, Plan, ACT, and WorkKeys, letters of recommendation, and extracurricular and volunteer activities. The education plan may include a program of study for high school courses, credits required for graduation, course information for help in developing the student's schedule, strategies for improving the student's weaknesses identified on standardized assessments, information on dual enrollment, advanced placement results, and access to a searchable database of apprenticeship, internship, job shadowing, or other work opportunities. A career/post-secondary plan would include aptitude assessments, career interests and goals, career cluster information, a resume-building application and cover letters, up-to-date labor market information, postsecondary education admission requirements and application forms, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), university or technical college graduation plan, an employer/military portal, and specific information on Wisconsin careers and quality of life.

6. Another provision of AB 40, addressed in a separate issue paper, would implement the full ACT suite for high school pupils statewide, including the Explore and Plan assessments, which precede the ACT, as well as WorkKeys, a work skills assessment. Explore is typically taken in ninth grade, and assesses a pupil's strengths and weaknesses in academics, as well as potential career options. Plan includes more difficult material, assessing a pupil's academic progress in high school and assisting with college and career planning. Under the budget proposal, all students in grade 11 would take the ACT college entrance exam, as well as WorkKeys, a job skills assessment intended to help high school pupils identify necessary coursework and provide another indicator for career readiness. ACT offers a "National Career Readiness Certificate" that can be earned by passing three WorkKeys exams: applied mathematics, reading for information, and locating information. The combined exposure to academic and career plans beginning in sixth grade, and college and workforce readiness assessments beginning in ninth grade, may encourage students to do well academically, if they are aware of how their schoolwork can prepare them for their chosen career.

7. Based on recent Wisconsin-focused economic and workforce development committee reports, these initiatives originate out of concern that state employers face a shortage of qualified workers even as the state and nation experience a prolonged period of relatively high unemployment rates. Anecdotally, employers have complained that high school graduates lack the "soft skills" that enable them to succeed in the workplace, including timeliness, communication skills, and ability to work within a team. Others, particularly manufacturers, note that fewer young people appear interested in technical careers, which often require some postsecondary education but less than a four-year college degree. Some have argued that this disconnect stems from a lack of career and technical education programs in high schools, and an over-emphasis on a college-preparatory curriculum. As a result, some argue, too many students are pursuing four-year degrees, relative to the number of jobs available to such workers in the U.S. economy.

8. On the other hand, others note that the evidence for a "skills gap," that is, many jobs going unfilled due to a lack of workers with the appropriate skills and training, is largely anecdotal and unsupported by labor market indicators and overall economic trends. For example, if there were a shortage of skilled workers, one would expect to see the labor market respond with rising real wages for qualified workers in short supply, and increasing weekly hours for those employed in "hard to fill" job sectors. Neither of these trends is currently evident, either nationally or in

Wisconsin. According to information gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nationally as of November, 2012, there were not enough job openings to employ all those looking for work, either in total, or within individual sectors such as construction, manufacturing, information, wholesale/retail trade, finance, and professional/business. Similarly, in Wisconsin there were between 1.9 and 2.5 available workers for every job vacancy in December, 2012. The economic evidence points to a drop in aggregate demand following the collapse of the housing market and the resulting recession as the reason for currently elevated unemployment and underemployment, not a lack of school quality or skilled workers. In any case, it seems unlikely that a "skills gap" suddenly opened between 2007, when the unemployment rate was 4.4%, and 2009, when it was over 10%. In most sectors, particularly in manufacturing, unemployment is high, and real, inflation-adjusted wages are flat or declining. On the other hand, there are some sectors experiencing tight labor market conditions in Wisconsin and nationally, such as the health care sector, in which the unemployment rate is under 2% and inflation-adjusted wages are rising as employers attempt to attract workers.

9. Wisconsin is in the process of implementing several other initiatives that are also designed to improve students' college and career readiness and competitiveness. The state has adopted the new, common core state academic standards, with a new assessment system aligned with those standards, expected in 2014-15. The state is building a new pre-kindergarten through postsecondary longitudinal student data system to provide better information to help improve student learning, and a new school accountability system has just been implemented, which will also focus explicitly on college and career readiness. It may be premature to provide state funding for this initiative, which would not be implemented until 2017-18, given the range of activities AB 40 would require.

## ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation.
2. Modify the Governor's recommendation to delete \$1,100,000 in 2014-15, but retain the requirements for school districts to provide academic and career planning to pupils enrolled in grades 6 to 12 beginning in 2017-18.

ALT 2      Change to Bill	
Funding	
GPR	- \$1,100,000

3. Delete provision.

ALT 3      Change to Bill	
Funding	
GPR	- \$1,100,000

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