

# TENNESSEE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

## MIDDLE GRADES POLICY

2.102

Middle grades include grades five through eight (5-8) or any combination of grades five through eight (5-8) as determined by the local school board. This policy sets forth the requirements and expectations for students in those grades.

### Policy Sections

- I. Coursework Requirements
- II. High School and Beyond Plan
- III. Assessment
- IV. Middle School Occupational Industry Professional Partnerships

#### I. Coursework Requirements

- (1) All students shall have access to a rigorous education that prepares them for high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce. All coursework shall be aligned to the State Board of Education (State Board)-approved Tennessee Academic Standards for that subject and course.
- (2) Students may take coursework, including career and technical education (CTE) courses, for high school credit. If a student successfully completes any of the State Board-required high school credits as evidenced by a passing grade in the course prior to grade nine (9), the student shall receive the graduation credit for that coursework. If a student attains an industry credential as promoted by the Department of Education while completing the high school course prior to grade nine (9), the industry credential shall be included for student performance, accountability measures, grading, and high school graduation with honors and distinction purposes.
- (3) Each local education agency (LEA) shall inform all students in grades seven through twelve (7-12) of the Juvenile Offender Act compiled in T.C.A. Title 55, Chapter 10, Part 7 in compliance with T.C.A. § 49-6-451.
- (4) Academic Requirements.
  - (a) Each year, all middle grade students shall complete coursework in English, mathematics, science, and social studies.
  - (b) All LEAs shall implement a project-based assessment in civics at least once in grades four through eight (4-8) pursuant to T.C.A § 49-6-1028.
    - 1. “Project-based” means an approach that engages students in learning essential knowledge and skills through a student-influenced inquiry process structured around complex authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks.

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2. The project-based assessment shall be developed by the LEA, measure the civics learning objectives contained in the social studies standards, and allow students to demonstrate understanding and relevance of public policy; the structure of federal, state, and local governments; and both the Tennessee and the United States constitutions.
- (c) The course of instruction in all public schools for kindergarten through grade eight (K-8) shall include art and music education in pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-6- 1025.
- (d) Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-6-412 a career interest inventory shall be administered to all students in grade seven (7), grade eight (8), or grade nine (9), the results of which shall be used to inform future course planning decisions and their plan of study.
- (e) Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-6-1010(a)(2), middle school students shall take one course in computer science education that includes instruction for at least one (1) one grading period during one (1) full school year of their middle school career. This applies to middle school students who enroll in the lowest grade level offered at a middle school starting in the 2024-25 school year or in any subsequent school year.
- (5) High school and middle grades faculty shall collaborate in planning curriculum and the transition between middle grades and high school, especially in relation to coursework expectations and vertical alignment of academic standards.

## II. High School and Beyond Plan

- (1) Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, all eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) grade students shall begin the development of a high school and beyond plan (“the plan”) that is reviewed at least annually and updated as needed for student use. For students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the IEP Transition Plan fulfills this requirement. School counselors shall be responsible for oversight of the plan. The plan shall be initially prepared by the student, parent/guardian, if available, school counselor, educator or other school staff who has received training from the school or district on how to support students in developing and revising the plan, and the 504 team, as appropriate. Overall, the plan shall:
  - (a) Include grade eight (8) through the two (2) years after high school graduation;
  - (b) Outline and connect the student’s goals for after high school to the courses or training that will equip the student with the skills necessary to meet these goals;

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- (c) When determining the student's goals for after high school, consider a variety of indicators such as student academic strengths and needs, career assessment results, attendance, behavior, and course grades;
  - (d) Include information regarding elective focuses aligned to the student's career aptitude assessment results,<sup>1</sup> including relevant career and technical education (CTE) programs of study, a student's readiness for specific early post-secondary opportunities (EPSOs), industry credentials, and work-based learning experiences; and
  - (e) Outline opportunities for students to begin building technical skills in a field of interest, in addition to employability, work-ethic, and leadership skills required to be successful in that job.
- (2) As part of the development of the plan, all students shall complete the following steps during the middle grades:
- (a) Take a career aptitude assessment during grade seven (7) or grade eight (8) to assist with understanding how a variety of skills and attributes impact potential success and satisfaction with different career options and work environments and use the results to inform the plan. The LEA shall provide students with information on career and technical education opportunities offered by the LEA;
  - (b) During grade eight (8), begin development of the plan through at least grade nine (9). High school and middle grades faculty shall work together to support students in developing and transitioning the plan between middle grades and high school; and
  - (c) Take a career interest inventory during the middle grades or by the end of grade nine (9) to assist in determining students' interests and in making career decisions.
- (3) Students shall develop the remainder of the plan during high school, as outlined in High School Policy 2.103.
- (4) A current version of the plan shall be included as part of a student's cumulative record.

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<sup>1</sup> The career aptitude assessment and career interest inventory shall be in compliance with Tennessee Code Annotated § 49-6-412. For further information about these assessments, contact the Department of Education's Office of Career Readiness.

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### III. Assessment

- (1) The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) assessment shall be administered annually in the following subjects: English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.
- (2) Students shall complete the TCAP assessment during the school year in which they complete the relevant course work.
- (3) Students with disabilities shall be provided appropriate accommodations in accordance with state and federal law and as determined by the IEP team or 504 team. English Learner proficiency level shall also be considered when determining if accommodations are needed. Needed accommodations and supports shall be reviewed at least annually.
- (4) The IEP team shall determine if a student with a disability shall participate in the general assessment with or without accommodations or in the alternate assessment. To participate in an alternate assessment, the IEP team shall determine that alternate assessment is more appropriate than the general assessment and that the student meets all three of the following eligibility requirements:
  - (a) the student has a significant cognitive disability and adaptive skills that result in performance that is substantially below grade-level achievement expectations even with the use of accommodations and modifications;
  - (b) The student is learning content linked to and derived from the Tennessee Academic Standards; and
  - (c) The student requires substantial modifications, adaptations, or supports to meaningfully access the subject area content and requires intensive individualized instruction in order to acquire and generalize knowledge.
- (5) The IEP team shall rule out that the inability to achieve the state grade-level achievement expectations is the result of excessive or extended absences or social, cultural, or economic differences. Participation in the alternate assessment shall be determined at least annually. A student who meets the eligibility criteria and whose IEP team determines participation in the alternate assessment is appropriate shall be assessed in all four (4) content areas: ELA, Math, science, and social studies.
- (6) Results of individual student performance from all administered TCAP examinations shall be provided in a timely fashion to facilitate the inclusion of these results as part of the student's grade. If an LEA does not receive its student TCAP examination scores at least five (5) instructional days before the scheduled end of the course, then the LEA may choose not to include student TCAP examination scores in the students' final course grades. The weight of the TCAP examination on the student's final average shall be determined by the

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local board of education within a range of zero percent (0%) to no more than twenty five percent (25%) for grades three through five (3-5), and within a range of no less than ten percent (10%) and no more than twenty- five percent (25%) for grades six through eight (6-8) in the 2018-2019 school year and thereafter.

- (7) Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-6-6007, all LEAs shall annually include in each school’s student handbook or other policy guidebook, and post to the district website, a local assessment policy. The assessment policy shall be posted to the district website by July 31 of each year and shall include, at a minimum, the following information:
- (a) The names of all state- and locally-required assessments that shall be administered in the upcoming school year;
  - (b) The purpose and use of each assessment;
  - (c) Information on how each locally required assessment complements and enhances student instruction and learning and how each local assessment serves a purpose distinct from required state assessments;
  - (d) The grade or class for which the assessment is to be administered;
  - (e) The tentative date or dates on which the assessment shall be administered;
  - (f) The local policy on the inclusion of TCAP scores into a student’s grade, including the percentage that TCAP scores shall be weighted for each grade level, the methodology by which the grades shall be calculated for inclusion in student grades, and the policy on excluding TCAP scores if they are not received at least five (5) instructional days before the end of the course;
  - (g) The anticipated timeframe when parents and students will receive results from the assessment; and
  - (h) Information on how parents can access the items on the student's state- required summative standardized assessments and the student's answers.

#### **IV. INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS**

- (1) Industry Professionals are individuals who are either actively or previously employed in an industry and role aligned to an occupational field of study that is offered in Middle and/or High Schools. These professionals may engage directly with schools and LEAs in many capacities to support student learning within their field of study, which may include, but is not limited to, CTE programs of study or other elective focus areas available to students in their LEA or public charter school.

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- (2) LEAs and public charter schools are strongly encouraged to partner with local industry to support integration of industry best practices and opportunities for student engagement at the middle school level in occupational fields of study. Industry Professionals may engage with LEAs and schools in various learning activities, as outlined below to support learning. These opportunities may be paid or unpaid, as determined by the LEA. Private or public employers may compensate Industry Professionals for their engagement with the LEA and/or school.
- (3) Activities for which an Industry Professional may engage with LEAs, schools, teachers, and/or students include, but are not limited to:
  - (a) Direct engagement in the classroom alongside a teacher of record to support student learning;
  - (b) Serving as a mentor to students pursuing career pathways in a relevant occupation;
  - (c) Guest speaking opportunities;
  - (d) Supporting the identification of relevant and industry-aligned supplemental classroom materials;
  - (e) Supporting in the development of unit plans and year-long scope and sequences; and/or
  - (f) Hosting industry tours, walk abouts, and/or job shadowing opportunities.
- (4) Industry Professionals are not required to hold an active teaching license to engage with students as contemplated by this section, however, they shall not serve as teacher of record unless properly licensed and employed by the LEA or public charter school.
- (5) LEAs and public charter schools shall ensure that prior to permitting the Industry Professional to engage directly with students, a criminal history background check has been conducted.
- (6) LEAs are encouraged to actively invite participation and publicize the opportunity to partner with Industry Professionals and may seek available grant or other funding opportunities to support the program.