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August 23, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: District School Superintendents

FROM: Dr. Cheri Yecke, Chancellor
K-12 Public Schools
Dr. Connie W. Graunke, Executive Director
Florida Center for Advising and Academic Support

SUBJECT: District Reporting of Major Areas of Interest

The A++ legislation established new requirements for high school graduation and middle school promotion. This memorandum outlines the reporting requirements associated with the major area of interest and school districts' responsibilities, which are numbered and presented in bold text.

Statutory Authority

Section 1003.428(2)(b)(1), Florida Statutes, states that a student needs: "Four credits in a major area of interest, such as sequential courses in a career and technical program, fine and performing arts, or academic content area, selected by the student as part of the education plan required by s. 1003.4156. Students may revise major areas of interest each year as part of annual course registration processes and should update their education plan to reflect such revisions."

Section 1003.4156(1)(a)(5), Florida Statutes, states: "One course in career and education planning to be completed in 7th or 8th grade. The course may be taught by any member of the instructional staff; must include career exploration using CHOICES for the 21st Century or a comparable cost-effective program; must include educational planning using the online student advising system known as Florida Academic Counseling and Tracking for Students at the Internet website FACTS.org; and shall result in the completion of a personalized academic and career plan. Each student shall complete an electronic personal education plan that must be signed by the student; the student's instructor, guidance counselor, or academic advisor; and the student's parent."

District Responsibilities

- 1. Districts are the system of record in certifying that students have met graduation requirements.**
- 2. Districts are required to record on each student's transcript the declared major area(s) of interest (MAIs) and courses taken (if any) to satisfy the graduation requirement each term.**
- 3. Districts are required to certify for graduation that students have successfully completed four credits aligned with a major area of interest.** Section 1003.428, Florida Statutes, provides that students can change their major, so long as they have successfully completed four credits associated with a major area of interest for graduation.
- 4. Districts may institute policies regarding when and how often students may change their major, as well as policies regarding schedule changes.** For example, changing a major area of interest during an academic year does not obligate the district to change a student's schedule for the current academic year.

Capturing Students MAI(s) Credits

All entering 9th graders in 2007-08 will be required to earn four credits in a declared major area of interest in order to graduate. The credit(s) and major(s) that students have taken must be recorded on a student's transcript with the major's 4-digit code attached to the course being used each school year (if any). There are three methods districts may use to capture students' MAI credits:

Method 1: District-generated. This method is determined and supported by district means; however it would involve districts collecting declared majors from students, verifying the credit(s) and major(s) were successfully completed, storing information, and placing a 4-digit major code for each major course on student transcripts.

Method 2: FACTS.org electronic Personal Education Planner (ePEP) Course File. Districts may download a file from FACTS.org which has student demographic information and all planned courses (including courses designated for a major area of interest). After utilizing FACTS.org ePEP for collecting the student MAI; districts will need to compare what students have planned in the ePEP on FACTS.org to what they actually took, reconcile any differences, store information, and place a 4-digit major code for each major course on student transcripts. The ePEP Course File will be available to districts for download from Northwest Regional Data Center (NWRDC) twice a year.

Method 3: Department of Education (DOE) Reconciliation File. Districts submit student transcripts to the Office of Application Support (OAS) High School Transcript Database (HSTDB) three times a year. After the fall and spring transcript submissions, OAS will take a current FACTS.org ePEP Course File containing planned courses and compare it to student transcripts contained in the HSTDB. Then, for every planned major in a student's ePEP or from a student's transcript, OAS will look for any courses on the transcript that are state-approved for those majors. The result of the comparison is the DOE Reconciliation File, which will be available to districts for download from NWRDC twice a year. The information contained in the file can be used to assist districts to determine student MAI credits, so that the information can be stored and placed on student transcripts. (See Attachment – File Descriptions for FACTS.org ePEP Course File and DOE Reconciliation File)

Methods two and three require that students create and maintain an ePEP so that the information is current each year. While the 2007 entering 9th graders are **not required** to have an ePEP, the A++ legislation required all 2006 entering 6th graders to complete an ePEP in order to be promoted to 9th grade. Consequently, within two years the majority of all entering 9th graders will have an ePEP. If districts choose to implement Method 2 or 3, they will need to institute a policy requiring all 2007 and 2008 9th graders to complete an ePEP. In addition, if using Method 2 or 3, schools will need to ensure that students keep their ePEPs current and reconciled with the information reported. If the ePEPs are not updated or corrected, the reported information will continue to be incorrect.

To help in managing this effort, FACTS.org has created a Student Activity System that allows authorized district middle school and high school personnel to access student activity for their district's schools. The system provides users with a summary report of student activity, including which students have a FACTS.org login ID, the number of planned major area of interest credits in students' ePEPs, and whether a transcript has been received in the HSTDB. The system also provides users with access to individual student plans and the ability to send the student notes. School rosters will be built based on Survey 6, 2 and 3 Student Database enrollment information. (A preview can be found at <http://facts23.facts.org/CounselorServices/Student%20Activity%20System%20Preview.pdf>.)

It is anticipated that a test FACTS.org ePEP Course File and DOE Reconciliation File will be available at NWRDC by the end of September that districts can use to assess the value of using the Reconciliation File to facilitate their reporting efforts. Additional guidance will be provided reflecting any changes in the reporting methods that may have arisen from the test files and include timelines for the ensuing process. It is anticipated that the first FACTS.org ePEP Course File will be made available at the end of October 2007 and the first DOE Reconciliation File will be made available by the end of November 2007.

Several attachments are provided for your convenience, including Questions and Answers regarding the FACTS.org ePEP and MAI reporting process and File Descriptions. If you have any questions, please utilize the contact information provided on the attachments.

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Attachments

- c: District Guidance Supervisors
- District MIS Directors
- Dr. Jay Pfeiffer, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Accountability, Research & Measurement
- Dr. Lavan Dukes, Bureau Chief, Education Information and Accountability Services
- Ms. Lillian Finn, Director, Secondary Reform, K-12 Public Schools