
High School Redesign in Tennessee

The Background:

In 2005, the Tennessee State Board of Education and State Department of Education convened a joint task force to study high school redesign. The task force consulted numerous experts and reviewed the performance of Tennessee students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and ACT. (Currently, Tennessee's curriculum standards are not aligned with NAEP or ACT standards.)

Governor Bredesen has recently signed on to the American Diploma Project (ADP), which is an initiative of Achieve, Inc., a bipartisan, non-profit organization designed to help states raise academic standards, improve assessments, strengthen accountability, and prepare students for post secondary education, work and citizenship. While twenty-six states have signed onto ADP, only five states have aligned their curriculum with ADP standards thus far.

In order to implement the proposed high school redesign in Tennessee, it will be necessary to amend the law (T.C.A. 49-1-212) to eliminate the two-track high school curriculum currently in place. A new "Scholastic Program of Study" would be the default pathway that all students would follow. This would include four credits in math to include Algebra I, II, geometry, and a higher math, as well as biology, chemistry and physics. All students would complete two credits of the same foreign language and four years of English that "must be honors, dual credit, AP or IB." There is an opt-out option, but it requires written approval between the student, counselor, principal, teacher(s) and parents. The use of ACT's Plan and Explore tests would be mandated for all students in grades 8 and 10 to obtain benchmarking data related to student readiness.

With many states currently pursuing high school redesign, implementation timelines range up to thirteen years to fully align curriculum and implement the professional development needed for teachers to support this overhaul of secondary education. In "Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts," ADP suggests, "Incorporating the ADP benchmarks into state education systems is a long-term agenda, and progress will be measured by incremental steps rather than radical shifts."

Tennessee's high school redesign effort appears to be on a faster track. The report of the High School Redesign Task Force was presented to the State Board of Education in January 2007. The State Board is planning to consider the task force report on first reading at their meeting on April 20, 2007. The State Board plan calls for implementation in Tennessee high schools beginning in 2008.

The Tennessee Education Association supports efforts to ensure that a high school diploma means students are prepared to succeed in the work place and in college. Successful implementation of high school redesign in Tennessee will require the following:

- an implementation timeline that recognizes the complexity of redesigning high schools
- a plan to engage parents and communities to build understanding and support
- a plan to recruit and retain well-trained teacher candidates, knowledgeable in both content and pedagogy, where there are shortages in specific subject area disciplines
- realignment of curriculum PreK-12 to ensure students are prepared for rigorous coursework at middle and high school levels
- reduced class size limits at all levels
- support and intervention programs to prevent increased dropout rates
- continuation of a robust career and technical education program
- high quality, job-embedded professional development sustained over time
- increased state funding for costs required for full implementation (e.g., costs associated with every student taking Plan and Explore tests; student support programs especially for ELL, special education and exceptional needs students; professional development; reduced class sizes)

The Master Plan Connection:

This item is connected to all of the focus areas of the SBE Master Plan. The issue of high school redesign highly impacts **curriculum** standards, school **leadership**, **teacher** training and professional growth, allotted **resources** and funding.

The Recommendation:

For information purposes; no action required.