

HF 316: Middle School Career Development

Overview

[HF 316](#) amends the educational standards in [Iowa Code 256.11](#) to clarify and expand expectations for career education in the middle grades. Beginning with the 2025–2026 school year, the updated code highlights the importance of introducing career-focused learning starting in grade 5. These activities and experiences are designed to build early career awareness, further develop and identify student’s employability skills and support the creation, review and revision of the Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) in later grades.

HF Legislative Requirements

- *In grades five and six, career planning and pathways. The career planning and pathways curriculum shall include career investigation, career connections and career intentions to help such students understand career opportunities in order to fully utilize the individualized career and academic plan developed pursuant to [section 279.61](#).*
- *In seventh and eighth grade, (7) Career instruction, exploration and development, which shall include career investigation, career connections and career intentions.*

Career Development Focus Areas for Grades 5-7:

Career Investigation

Students explore potential career areas and pathways while continuing to understand and apply their own strengths, interests and work values to their career development. Activities and learning experiences may include:

- Use developmentally appropriate self-assessments and inventories to identify strengths, employability skills, academic interests and connections
- Integration of career pathway exploration into course content
- Opportunities to explore a variety of postsecondary education and training options
- Identification of academic strengths and connections to postsecondary options

Career Connections

This includes career experiences that expand career awareness by connecting students’ areas of interest and provides hands-on, active learning opportunities for students to gain further understanding of potential career pathways. Activities and learning experiences may include:

- Community service learning
- Resume and career search development
- Classroom speakers
- Creation of career portfolios
- Business/industry tours
- Activities and experiences that support and build social capital

Career Intention

For this area, the focus is on helping students set goals and make plans through activities, lessons or experiences that connect their academic success to future postsecondary and career opportunities and builds understanding of career pathways and academic alignment. Examples of career intention can include:

- Student identified goal planning and action steps
- Identification of one-two career pathways of interest connected to career investigation
- Understanding of attendance and correlation to success in high school and beyond

District Implementation

Districts are encouraged to begin by identifying current career learning in grades 5–7 to recognize existing strengths and areas for additional opportunities. Many school counselors are already delivering career exploration lessons aligned with the [Iowa School Counselor Framework](#), offering a solid starting point. Building on this foundation, districts can take a systems approach by mapping current career related activities to the three required components—Career Investigation, Career Connections, and Career Intention—and identifying gaps or areas for expansion. Collaboration between school counselors, classroom teachers and administrators can help embed career-focused learning into core instruction and interdisciplinary experiences. Embedding these experiences throughout course content and leveraging community partnerships, project-based learning and student reflection ensures career readiness is not a one-time event, but an integrated, scaffolded and developmentally appropriate learning process across the middle grades.

To provide a framework to support district integration, the [district career and academic \(DCAP\) template](#) has been updated to include Section 8: Middle School. Districts are strongly encouraged to add a middle school representative to the DCAP team to ensure thoughtful implementation and continuity of career development efforts across 5-12.

Department Role to Support Implementation

The Department will support the expansion of middle school career learning by developing and sharing resources aligned with the three focus areas: Career Investigation, Career Connections and Career Intention. These resources may include sample lessons/resources, self-assessments, integration strategies and examples of how to embed career-focused learning into existing course content. In collaboration with Regional Planning Partnerships (RPPs), the Department will also provide professional learning opportunities—either as part of existing DCAP workshops or as stand-alone training sessions—to support district implementation of this work.

For any questions about this information, please contact Education Program Consultant for Career and Academic Planning and School Counseling, Erica Woods-Schmitz (erica.woods-schmitz@iowa.gov).