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Commissioner's Action Plan for Refining the Profile of Learning

Christine Jax, Ph.D., Commissioner

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Commissioner's Action Plan for Refining the Profile of Learning

OVERVIEW

This action plan has been developed to affirm Minnesota's public policy for standards-based reform and to recommend revisions to Minnesota's Graduation Standards. In developing this plan, Commissioner Christine Jax takes into consideration the issues identified during early implementation of the Profile of Learning, the report of the Achieve/CBE review of the standards, and the recommendations of the February, 2001, Report by the Academic Panel, *Recommendations for Continuous Improvement of the Profile of Learning*.

Based on that feedback, the plan uses existing standards as the starting point. Many aspects of current policy will remain in place, including:

- the current Learning Areas that define a comprehensive education for Minnesota's students;
- a strong emphasis on critical thinking processes and applied learning;
- a broad level of content in the standards themselves with specific content remaining a local choice;
- improving teaching and learning as a primary role of the Profile; and
- local performance assessment as the determiner of a student's successful completion of the state required standards.

This plan upholds those positive aspects of the Profile of Learning and proposes revisions to:

- rewrite and reorganize the standards for increased clarity,
- re-evaluate the number of content standards at each level,
- re-evaluate the number of content standards required for graduation; and
- re-evaluate the groupings of the standards from which students make choices.

This plan will increase support for implementation of the standards by:

- completing curriculum frameworks to support all learning areas;
- revising the state scoring rubrics; and
- continuing to provide assistance to build school district capacity to implement the standards.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN

Recommendation: The Academic Panel recommends revising language for all K-12 standards so that they are written and organized clearly enough to be understood by teachers, students and parents. The panel recommends that the language of the standards include statements of declarative knowledge as well as a procedural knowledge. This will involve adding more specific language within the standards to clarify what the student must know at a broad level. The revision should address developmental progression to assure increasing levels of expectations from the primary through high school levels. To guide the selection of specific content at the local level, the Academic Panel recommends completing curriculum frameworks that give examples of specific content.

The Academic Panel's report makes an important distinction between clarity and specificity and does not recommend specific content be written into the language of the standards. Commissioner Jax concurs with the Academic Panel's recommendation that decisions about content and curriculum should remain at the local level. Local choices about content and curriculum should be guided by the Profile's supporting documents – for example, by curriculum frameworks and state scoring rubrics.

Response: Commissioner Jax concurs with these recommendations and is directing CFL to convene workgroups in the various learning areas to review the existing language and propose revisions and additions to improve the clarity of the standards. CFL staff also will begin a review of existing curriculum frameworks and will complete curriculum frameworks where they do not exist and are needed. (Curriculum frameworks have been developed for five learning areas, and a sixth curriculum framework is currently being developed.) The curriculum frameworks support the standards with examples of specific content for local choice. The new language in the standards and these supporting documents together will provide clear and understandable expectations for teachers, students and schools.

Recommendation: The Academic Panel recommends that the number of standards at each level (primary, intermediate, middle and high school) and the number of high school standards that are required for graduation be examined and evaluated for reasonableness.

Response: Commissioner Jax concurs. This examination will be conducted as the standards are reviewed for clarity and developmental progression. The evaluation of the number of standards required by the state for graduation will include reviewing and evaluating the choice groupings of standards from which students select a required standard. During the review, a need could become apparent to fill a gap in sequence of the standards over the grade levels and/or to shift some standards from one level to another. Consolidation of some content standards will be examined, which could lead to a proposed change in the number of standards in some levels.

Recommendation: The Academic Panel recommended that expedited rulemaking authority be given to the Commissioner.

Response: The workgroups will explore the extent of changes that may be needed to improve the clarity and organization of the standards and to align the standards with the supporting documents. They will also identify possible changes resulting from the examination and evaluation of the number of standards. This work as well as the development of the supporting documents will take time to accomplish.

It is anticipated that enough preliminary work will be completed to identify the extent of amendments that will be needed, and to enter into the rulemaking process in the spring of 2002 to amend the Profile of Learning rule. Rulemaking authority will be requested in 2002.

Recommendation: The Academic Panel further recommends a number of activities by CFL to ensure that the capacity of schools that is necessary to deliver the standards is in place:

- Revise and carefully design the state scoring rubrics and ensure that they incorporate a progression of expectations from primary through high school level.
- Make available model exemplars of student work.
- Identify best practice strategies.
- Make available best practice networks of lead teachers to provide instructional support to school districts across the state.

Response: Commissioner Jax agrees that strong rubrics will support and strengthen the implementation of the standards. CFL will initiate revision of the state scoring rubrics for all standards and address developmental progression across the levels. Rubrics that describe characteristics of student work that demonstrates increased difficulty and complexity over the levels provide information about the level of rigor that is expected. Revised rubrics must align with the revision of the K-12 standards.

CFL will continue to provide leadership and to develop and provide assistance, including support for best practice, as needed to support the capacity to deliver the standards in schools across the state.

Recommendation: The Academic Panel recommends that there be an end date to the provision that currently allows school sites and boards to vote on the number of standards that students are required to complete. This will specify a point in time when Minnesota students will complete the same state required standards.

Response: Commissioner Jax will further consider this recommendation after the extent of changes needed is identified, and a timeline for revision of the standards and supporting documents is developed. When dates are established for the revised standards and supporting documents to be available to districts, this recommendation can be discussed with a more substantial base of information.

Recommendation: The Academic Panel recommended consolidation of the Learning Areas to reduce the number of Learning Areas.

Response: Commissioner Jax disagrees with this recommendation. The revisions detailed above within the Profile's current learning areas, including reconsidering the number of required standards and the possible need for consolidating some content standards, will address concerns about the quantity and manageability of required standards for students without reducing the learning areas. The current learning areas are Minnesota's public policy definition of a comprehensive education for students, and they determine the learning opportunities that are provided to all students. Years of public debate and work among educators went into deciding the learning areas, and the work of schools to date to implement the Profile has been structured around them. Revisions to the K-12 standards will be examined within the structure of the current learning areas. This will avoid unnecessary changes for schools in continuing implementation.

Recommendation: Finally, the Academic Panel recommends the establishment of a manageable state-level review cycle for the Profile of Learning standards.

Response: Commissioner Jax concurs that research and best practice in teaching and learning necessitate cyclic revision of standards, as does experience gained from implementation in Minnesota's schools. This recommendation will be taken into consideration as a part of the review and the development of recommendations for revisions to the standards.