

Cross-State Policy Scan

Middle School Career Exploration

DRAFT

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Case Study 1: Florida

Promotion-linked career and education planning course + personalized academic and career plan

Primary lever: One required career and education planning course in grades 6-8, tied to middle-grades promotion and producing a personalized academic and career plan.

Nevada design question: Does Nevada want a required delivery vehicle, or should it borrow Florida's course-to-plan logic without using promotion as the enforcement point?

What the policy actually does

Florida's middle grades promotion law requires students to complete one course in career and education planning in grades 6, 7, or 8. The course may be taught by any member of the instructional staff, must be Internet-based and customizable, and must include research-based assessments. It must result in a completed personalized academic and career plan that students can access and update as they move through middle and high school.

The plan is not a generic goal-setting worksheet. Florida statute and implementing materials require content on graduation requirements, diploma designations, the CTE pathway to a standard diploma, Bright Futures scholarships, state university and Florida College System admissions, AP/IB/AICE, dual enrollment, career dual enrollment, work-based learning, internships, preapprenticeships, apprenticeships, career-themed courses, and industry certification pathways.

Student evidence	Completed personalized academic and career plan, produced through the required course and updated over time.
Delivery model	Stand-alone or integrated into another course or courses; Florida's current practice heavily favors integrated delivery.
Adult role	Instructional staff can teach the course; Florida's 2025 workgroup also highlights career specialists and parent/guardian review as implementation supports.
Data/quality question	Whether course completion actually produced adequate career research, reflection, experiential learning, and high school course-planning support.

The important implementation detail

Florida is not simply a clean example of "require a course." It is a cautionary example about how a course requirement behaves once it hits middle school schedules. A 2025 Florida Department of Education workgroup reported that 91.7 percent of 2023-24 enrollments in career and education planning were in integrated courses rather than fully dedicated courses. The workgroup also found only three fully dedicated, semester-long career and education planning courses among 80 approved courses, accounting for 8.3 percent of enrollment. Some districts reportedly delivered the career-planning content in as little as two weeks at the end of another course.

That finding is useful for Nevada because it separates the policy signal from the student experience. A required course can look strong on paper but still be thin in practice if the state does not define quality, minimum time, adult supports, and the planning artifact well enough.

What commissioners should learn

- The strongest part of Florida is the course-to-plan sequence: exploration must culminate in a student-facing plan connected to actual high school and postsecondary options.
- The weakest implementation point is quality control when the requirement is embedded into other classes without a clear floor for time, reflection, advising, or student evidence.
- Florida's 2025 workgroup points to a more sophisticated implementation model: career specialists, a high school course planning questionnaire for rising ninth graders, parent/guardian review and approval, and more experiential learning.
- For Nevada, the most transferable piece may be the required planning content, not the promotion-linked course requirement.

Nevada adaptation questions

- Could Nevada require a grade 8 career navigation component within the existing academic planning transition, rather than creating a promotion condition?

- What minimum content should be in the plan: graduation pathways, local CTE/pathway options, dual credit, work-based learning, postsecondary training, apprenticeships, and family/adult review?
- If Nevada allows integrated delivery, what prevents the experience from becoming a two-week compliance add-on?
- Should Nevada pair any plan requirement with a state model questionnaire or template for ninth-grade course selection?

Source links: [Florida Statute §1003.4156](#) | [FDOE 2025 Best Practices Report](#) | [FDOE College & Career Planning](#)

Case Study 2: Virginia

Required career investigations course or equivalent + Academic and Career Plan

Primary lever: Every middle school must provide career investigation; divisions may use an alternate delivery method if it is equivalent in content and rigor and supports the Academic and Career Plan.

Nevada design question: How much flexibility can Nevada allow while still preserving a real statewide floor for content, rigor, and student evidence?

What the policy actually does

Virginia's Standards of Accreditation require each middle school to provide a course in career investigation. Local divisions may use alternate means of delivering the career investigation content, but only if the alternate approach is equivalent in content and rigor and provides the foundation for students to develop their Academic and Career Plans.

The Academic and Career Plan must include a high school program of study and a postsecondary career pathway based on the student's interests. It must be reviewed and updated before the student enters grades 9 and 11; be signed by the student, parent or guardian, and designated school official; and be included in the student record. The middle school course is therefore not an isolated experience. It is meant to feed a student record and planning process.

Virginia also frames career development as a continuum. Elementary students begin an Academic and Career Plan Portfolio that includes interests, values, and skills. In grades 6-8, students identify connections among course content, achievement, career choices, interests, skills, quality of life, education/training, employability skills, career research, and high school vocational/technical opportunities.

Student evidence	Academic and Career Plan, plus locally defined course or equivalent evidence aligned to career development standards.
Delivery model	Course required at the school level, with alternate equivalent delivery allowed by division.
Local example	Prince William County uses exploratory middle school rotations and requires all seventh graders to complete a nine-week Career Investigations course.
Quality control	The key phrase is equivalent in content and rigor; without a definition, flexibility could become uneven implementation.

The important implementation detail

Virginia gives Nevada a more realistic model than a pure statewide course mandate. It requires a meaningful experience, but it does not demand a single schedule design. A local division can satisfy the requirement through a career investigations course or an equivalent approach, so long as the approach is rigorous enough to support the Academic and Career Plan.

The local example matters. Prince William County's model shows how a required career investigations experience can coexist with broader exploratory electives. Sixth and seventh grade students rotate through nine-week elective courses, eighth grade students take semester courses, and all seventh graders complete Career Investigations. This matters for Nevada because one fear of a required career course is that it will crowd out other exploration. Virginia suggests the requirement can be embedded into an exploratory middle school structure.

What commissioners should learn

- Virginia's transferable idea is not just "course or no course." It is a course-equivalent framework tied to a required plan and a student record.
- The state anchors flexibility in standards and plan development. Nevada would need to name the common content, the acceptable forms of evidence, and the relationship to the Academic Learning Plan/four-year plan.
- A required grade-level experience can be operationalized as a nine-week course, advisory sequence, CTE exploratory rotation, embedded units, or approved equivalent if equivalency is defined clearly.
- Virginia's plan-signature model gives Nevada a possible way to add family/adult review without requiring an intensive counselor conference for every student.

Nevada adaptation questions

- Should Nevada define an approved-equivalent framework: course, advisory, embedded module sequence, CTE rotation, career coach delivery, or partner-supported programming?
- What does equivalent content and rigor mean in Nevada terms: minimum standards, minimum student activities, artifact, adult review, and local high school pathway connection?
- Should the career exploration component become part of the student record, or simply inform the ninth-grade/four-year academic plan?
- Who verifies completion if counselor capacity is uneven: counselor, advisor, career coach, teacher of record, or school designee?

Source links: [VDOE Academic & Career Plan](#) | [Virginia middle school instructional program regulation](#) | [Prince William County example](#)

Case Study 3: Washington

Grade 7 inventory + grade 8 High School and Beyond Plan start

Primary lever: Academic planning spine: career interest/skills inventory by grade 7; High School and Beyond Plan begins by grade 8 with first-year high school course plan and annual updates.

Nevada design question: Can Nevada strengthen its Academic Learning Plan/four-year academic plan requirements into a navigation guarantee without creating a separate course mandate?

What the policy actually does

Washington's High School and Beyond Plan is a graduation requirement that begins before high school. By seventh grade, each student must complete a career interest and skills inventory that informs eighth-grade course-taking and the student's initial education and career goals. By eighth grade, each student must begin a High School and Beyond Plan that includes proposed first-year high school courses aligned to graduation requirements and the student's high school and postsecondary goals.

The required plan elements go beyond a simple course schedule. State rules require career goals and interests aided by a skills and interest assessment, secondary and postsecondary education/training goals, a four-year course plan aligned to goals, options for advanced course sequences, dual credit, CTE programs and equivalencies, work-based learning that can lead to technical college certifications and apprenticeships, mastery-based credit opportunities, a resume or activity log, and financial aid information. Parents and guardians must be involved, and the plan is updated annually with staff support.

Student evidence	Career interest/skills inventory, grade 8 initial HSBP, proposed first-year high school course plan, four-year course plan, resume/activity log, and annual revisions.
Delivery model	Planning requirement rather than a middle school course requirement; districts may embed HSBP components in core, elective, or credit-bearing courses.
Implementation system	Washington is moving toward a universal statewide HSBP platform, with SchoolLinks selected as the platform all districts serving grades 7-12 will transition to by 2026-27.
Known risk	Washington's State Board warns that the plan can become a disconnected compliance task without trusted-adult review, professional development, integration into school structures, and community-connected opportunities.

The important implementation detail

Washington is the strongest case for Nevada's academic-plan route. It shows how a state can create middle school career navigation expectations through grade-level planning triggers rather than a separate course mandate. The grade 7 inventory is timed to inform grade 8 course-taking and the initial high school plan. The grade 8 plan is explicitly connected to first-year high school course selection, which is the moment when student choices start becoming consequential.

The second important lesson is that a platform is not a guarantee. Washington is standardizing the planning platform because district tools had varied, but its State Board's 2025 recommendations caution that meaningful implementation depends on funding, professional development, integration into school structures, and regular structured review with trusted adults. The report also warns that HSBP activities can feel like disconnected checkboxes when completed with minimal guidance and little relevance to student aspirations.

What commissioners should learn

- A planning-spine model can be substantive if it includes grade-level triggers, required content, adult support, annual revision, and portability.
- The timing is critical: grade 7 inventory -> grade 8 course planning -> grade 9 entry. Nevada should focus on the transition moment, not just the existence of a plan.
- A common template or platform can improve consistency and portability, but it does not replace staff capacity or advising routines.

- Washington’s experience suggests that career planning needs repeated touchpoints and real pathway information; one inventory or one static plan is not enough.

Nevada adaptation questions

- Should Nevada require a grade 8 career navigation component as the bridge between the middle school Academic Learning Plan and the high school four-year academic plan?
- Which elements of Washington’s plan are essential for Nevada: interest inventory, high school course plan, CTE/dual credit/WBL options, postsecondary goals, family involvement, annual updates?
- Does Nevada need a common statewide template, minimum data fields, or platform guidance for portability?
- How can Nevada avoid a planning requirement that is technically complete but not meaningful to students?

Source links: [OSPI High School and Beyond Plan](#) | [Washington WAC 180-51-220](#) | [2025 Washington SBE HSBP Recommendations](#)

Case Study 4: Idaho

Career exploration course(s) + parent-approved career pathway plan + annual review

Primary lever: Statewide course requirement for grade 7 or 8, paired with First Steps standards/resources, required educator professional development, flexible delivery, and a parent-approved career pathway plan.
Nevada design question: If Nevada requires a common experience, what state supports are needed so the mandate is feasible instead of another local burden?

What the policy actually does

Idaho law requires every grade 7 or 8 student in a public district or charter school to complete one or more career exploration courses, with a parent opt-out. The courses must align with First Steps standards and may be delivered face-to-face, virtually, online, or in a hybrid format. Staff teaching the course must complete approved professional development.

Idaho also requires a career pathway plan developed by the student, with parent or guardian approval and school personnel advice. The plan must include career exploration courses or workforce discovery activities, outline a course of study and learning activities, be reviewed annually, and be revisable at any time. Administrative rules also require, by the end of grade 8, a parent-approved career pathway plan for high school and post-high-school options.

The state’s implementation infrastructure is notable. Idaho CTE launched First Steps after the legislature expanded CTE to grades 7 and 8. First Steps provides standards, curriculum resources, and professional development. Idaho’s Next Steps Idaho site includes an eighth-grade lesson for beginning the Career Pathway Plan, timed to school-year registration. Idaho Digital Learning Alliance also offers an eighth-grade online career exploration course that covers the 16 Career Clusters, employability skills, strengths, career options, personal networks, interest inventory results, and an eighth-grade plan.

Student evidence	Career exploration course completion plus parent-approved Career Pathway Plan reviewed annually.
Delivery model	Face-to-face, virtual, online, or hybrid; one or more courses; online course option available through Idaho Digital Learning Alliance.
State capacity lever	First Steps standards, curriculum resources, and required professional development before teaching the course.
Equity/access lever	Flexible delivery and state-supported online course make small/rural implementation more plausible than a pure in-person staffing requirement.

The important implementation detail

Idaho is the case that most directly answers the “what would it take to make a requirement real?” question. The state did not only mandate a student experience. It built an implementation ecosystem: standards, curriculum resources, professional development, a planning tool, parent approval, annual review, and virtual/online delivery options. This is a different kind of policy model than simply adding a sentence to statute.

For Nevada, Idaho is useful because it shows what a stronger middle school guarantee costs in design complexity. If Nevada wants to move beyond a plan artifact and require a common student experience, it likely needs some combination of model curriculum, approved modules, career coach/counselor supports, professional learning, and online delivery for rural/small schools.

What commissioners should learn

- A course requirement is more viable when paired with a state-created implementation package.

- Parent approval and annual review turn the plan into an ongoing navigation routine, not just a one-time grade 8 form.
- Flexible delivery matters. Idaho's online and hybrid pathways make the model more adaptable for districts with limited staffing or scheduling capacity.
- The state can require adult training for those delivering the experience, which may improve quality but also increases implementation burden.

Nevada adaptation questions

- If Nevada requires a common experience, should NDE provide approved modules, model lessons, or a course-equivalent menu tied to existing CCR Toolkit and middle school CTE standards?
- Would a professional development requirement be realistic, or should Nevada begin with recommended training and model facilitation guidance?
- Should career coach authority be connected to this guarantee as an allowable delivery/support role?
- Could Nevada provide an online or hybrid option so rural and small schools can meet the guarantee without creating a new local course section?

Source links: [Idaho Code §33-1614](#) | [Idaho First Steps](#) | [Next Steps Idaho Career Pathway Plan lesson](#) | [Idaho Digital Learning Alliance 8th Grade Career Exploration](#)

Case Study 5: Pennsylvania

Career readiness benchmark/evidence model tied to standards and reporting

Primary lever: Student-level evidence and reporting model: career portfolio artifacts, individualized career plan, and state monitoring through data/reporting rather than a single course mandate.
Nevada design question: How can Nevada verify that career exploration happened without overbuilding a compliance-heavy reporting system?

What the policy actually does

Pennsylvania's Career Readiness Indicator creates benchmarks at grades 5, 8, and 11. By the end of grade 8, a student must have a career portfolio that includes the K-5 evidence plus six additional pieces of evidence from grades 6-8, or at least two pieces in each of grades 6, 7, and 8. Evidence must validate that all four Career Education and Work standards strands have been meaningfully addressed, and one of the grade 6-8 pieces must be the student's individualized career plan.

The state treats evidence as more than attendance. Guidance states that school entities must implement activities with fidelity and rigor, demonstrate meaningful engagement, connect activities to students' interests, skills, and goals, and align them to local, regional, and state workforce needs. Pennsylvania also encourages partnerships with workforce boards, chambers, business and industry, postsecondary institutions, and community partners.

For reporting, school entities submit individual student data into PIMS to verify whether each student met the benchmark by the end of grades 5, 8, and 11. Monitoring may include requests for student portfolios, graded artifacts, lesson plans/curriculum, K-12 guidance plans, event agendas, scoring guides, rubrics, and other documentation.

Student evidence	Six grade 6-8 pieces of evidence, including an individualized career plan, aligned to career standards and stored in a portfolio.
Delivery model	Flexible. Evidence can come from guidance activities, curriculum integration, community events, workplace experiences, research, reflections, interviews, rubrics, or other artifacts.
Reporting model	Student-level Y/N benchmark reporting through PIMS, with school-entity assurance of evidence quality and possible monitoring requests.
Quality control	Participation alone is not sufficient evidence; assessments, grades, report cards, and generic attendance documents do not prove meaningful engagement.

The important implementation detail

Pennsylvania is the most useful case for commissioners who want to know whether a guarantee is real. It does not solve career exploration by requiring one course. It solves it by requiring evidence across time. The student must produce artifacts, one of which is an individualized career plan. That evidence logic is powerful for Nevada because a plan-only model risks being too thin, while a course-only model may be too rigid.

The caution is that evidence systems can become heavy. Pennsylvania's model asks school entities to track artifacts, report benchmark status, and stand behind the quality of documentation. That may be too much for Nevada's first

move. But the underlying distinction is essential: completion should mean evidence of engagement, not just participation.

What commissioners should learn

- Pennsylvania separates experience from proof. A student can satisfy the benchmark through multiple kinds of experiences, but must produce evidence.
- The individualized career plan is not the whole system; it is one required artifact inside a broader career portfolio.
- Evidence examples can be flexible: inventories with reflection, research products, interview notes, digital pictures/video, rubrics, career plan components, resumes, business plan outlines, or written reflections.
- A reporting model can support improvement, but it can also create compliance burden if Nevada requires too many artifacts or uses public accountability before implementation stabilizes.

Nevada adaptation questions

- Should Nevada require one portable grade 8 artifact, or a small evidence set such as inventory + reflection + pathway connection + plan component?
- What does Nevada consider acceptable evidence: completed plan field, reflection, family/adult conference note, interest inventory, pathway comparison, course plan, or portfolio entry?
- Would Nevada report only completion, completion plus disaggregation, or no statewide data in the first phase?
- How can Nevada use evidence for improvement without turning the guarantee into a paperwork audit?

Source links: [Pennsylvania Career Readiness Guidance](#) | [Pennsylvania Career Readiness FAQ / Evidence Guidance](#) | [Pennsylvania Career Ready PA overview](#)