

Maine's Career and Life Development Standards

Reviewed by Dr. Spencer G. Niles, Department Head and Professor, Penn State University, Department of Counselor Education, Counseling Psychology, and Rehabilitation Services.

I have reviewed the Maine Career and Life Development Standards. Comments I provide will address the following issues for each heading provided on the website:

<http://www.maine.gov/education/lres/review/cld.htm>

- The clarity of the document for instruction and curriculum development
- The coherence of the document
- The accessibility of the performance indicators (please note that performance indicators are supported by descriptors which define the depth and breath of the performance indicator)
- The essential nature of the work. We are eager to know whether we have focused the knowledge and skills on the very core of the content area. Can we take anything out? Must we add anything?
- The focus on 21st century skills and knowledge. Have we adequately prepared students for successful participation in the 21st century?

I. Definition of Terms

This section is, in fact, an exemplar for other states. The definitions provided represent the current state-of-the-art thinking in the career development literature. They link career development to human development, which acknowledges the relatedness of the multiple life roles people play throughout their lifetimes. This is essential because too often work activity is considering in isolation of its relationship with other life activities. When this approach is taken within K-12 preparation, students are prepared for a life that does not exist. Work occurs within a greater life context and this must be acknowledged and addressed within a developmental framework.

The developmental perspective offered in the definition of terms provides a useful framework for the subsequent development of standards for assessing career development progress. The terms are comprehensive and clear. Moreover, the incorporation of rational and intuitive approaches to decision-making is outstanding. Think about how you personally have made some of your career decisions. I would venture that most people have done so intuitively (e.g., “it just felt like the right thing to do” or “it didn’t feel like the right thing for me to do”). Yet, students are not taught how to develop intuitive approaches to decision-making. Both rational and intuitive styles are useful.

The approach reflected in the definition of terms is essential for developing responsible citizens in the 21st century.

II. Critical Information

This section continues the important emphasis on career and life development. The background resources identified are viewed as leading resources nationally and internationally and, thus, very appropriate for reference points in development the Standards. The grade spans used to as a developmental framework are appropriate points of demarcation for career development tasks. The philosophical approach related to the continuous cycling of the processes of identifying, demonstrating, analyzing and evaluating is sound vis-à-vis career development theory and developmental psychology. Acknowledging the cyclical processes involved in identity development, in this case career identity development, provides the opportunity to bring attention to individual differences in context and development. Differences in learning styles, backgrounds, and advantages can be integrated into strategies for assisting students.

Embedding career development concepts within the curriculum is essential for helping students connect their academic work to their future opportunities. Data indicate that many students who leave school before graduating psychologically withdrew long before they did so physically. Often, this is because students can see no connection between their school activities and their future lives. To the degree that students can build connections between where they are and where they can go in their lives, a sense of hope and optimism is fostered. This translates into school success and increased graduation rates. Finally, the use of technology in providing career assistance to students has multiple benefits. First, some excellent computer-based resources exist to help students accomplish important career development tasks. Secondly, and indirectly, exposure to technology that is driven by positive activities connected to personal goals creates a positive attitude toward the constructive use of technology. It is essentially one way to enhance computer literacy in students.

The information in this section is clear, coherent, and current.

III. Organization and Resources

Each content area addresses essential areas related to fostering student career development. The theme of life role awareness, balance, etc. is evident in the content areas. I also applaud the mention of a global society as the stage upon which career opportunities unfold. Personally, I would like to see the reference to decision-making strategies more specifically include intuitive approaches. Without specification it is too easy to simply default solely to rational decision-making styles. As noted previously, both approaches play a role in the career decision-making process for most people.

The statement regarding the importance of making the standards accessible to parents, etc., is an important point. This point was, in fact, I think lost in the most recent revision

of the National Career Development Guidelines. Staying mindful of this is important and allows participation of key stakeholders.

Thus, the content information is clear, coherent, and current- in fact, it is state-of-the-art.

The resources listed are comprehensive and contain many of the classic resources within the field. One resource that may be worth listing is the National Career Development Association (NCDA). NCDA offers many relevant resources for parents, teachers, and counselors (some at no cost) that relate to career development for students.

IV. 1997 Versus Revised Standards

The 1997 Standards are more narrow and, frankly, at times less specific than the revised standards. The revised standards are developmentally sound and the performance indicators clearly connect with the content areas. Furthermore, they represent sound applications of the content areas. What would be useful to add would be specific examples of performance indicators as was done in the 1997 Standards. This will help achieve the goal of accessibility related to the implementation of the standards.

The content areas from the 1997 Standards are, I think, poorly labeled. For example, “Career Preparation” really makes no sense at the elementary school level and is a misleading description of the career development tasks confronting students at this level. The revised standards are much more in tune with developmental levels.

I think that the performance indicators are more developmentally appropriate in the revised standards when compared to the 1997 standards. They are also clearer and more coherent. Providing specific examples of how students can demonstrate their performance in each area could strengthen their accessibility.

V. Survey

Completed and submitted.