



**BRIDGE Act Preparing Today's Students to Become Tomorrow's Workforce**

*By Brad Bryant, State School Superintendent, and State Representative Fran Millar*

Creating an atmosphere that motivates high school students to learn because they see the relevance of their studies to their career dreams and future is essential for Georgia and our economy. Legislation is now being implemented in Georgia high schools that focuses on students receiving quality career advisement and links the high school coursework with their future college and career goals.

The implementation of the BRIDGE (Building Resourceful Individuals to Develop Georgia's Economy) Act – House Bill 400 – will become an integral part of a student's educational plan this year. The BRIDGE Act will help students and parents work together to enhance their child's education to reach their goals and dream career.

The most critical part of this recently signed law is the requirement for all students in middle and high school to receive annual career guidance and advisement to choose a career area, create an Individual Graduation Plan (IGP), and graduate high school prepared to go to college or enter the workforce. The new rigorous performance standards and graduation requirements found in our Georgia secondary schools better prepare our students to enter life after high school graduation.

The BRIDGE Act and Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle's Career Academy initiative are ensuring our students are prepared to move on successfully from one phase of their educational life to the next, and eventually to become productive members of Georgia's workforce. A qualified workforce will attract strong, stable companies and industries to Georgia.

The BRIDGE Act initially focuses on students in grades 6 to 8 and their need to explore careers and receive career guidance. This exploration and advisement can begin by logging into the GAcollege411 or other Career Information System web site to create a student account and complete one of the many career interest inventories found on the site. The career inventories can help students discover who they are and the many talents and skills they possess.

With career advisement and guidance, eighth grade students will transition to high school with a plan to learn, develop leadership and technical skills, and have a goal in mind for what they want to be when they grow up. Most of all, we want every student ready to become a part of the strong Georgia workforce.

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#### **Individual Graduation Plan begins in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade**

Another way middle school students may explore careers is through the Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) programs currently operating in our Georgia middle schools. These programs provide students the opportunity to explore a career and technical field to see if it is a career they would like to pursue.

As students log in and use the GAcademy411 or other Career Information System web site each year, they will have additional skills and choices they will need to make and discuss with their advisor, parents and school counselor. These discussions will lead to the next part of the BRIDGE Act that requires all 8<sup>th</sup> grade students during their spring semester to create an IGP.

This graduation plan will help “map out” or develop a plan of all required academic and selected elective courses and give them flexibility to select additional elective courses of interests to take during high school. The IGP may also be known as a Program of Study or Plan of Study, but all give students the same results in planning their high school courses.

In addition to middle and high school students receiving career guidance and creating an IGP, students also need the opportunity to earn postsecondary credits while in high school. Our secondary and postsecondary schools have worked together to provide course instruction in our high schools while providing students the opportunity to earn college credits at the same time.

These courses will be academically challenging and will help prepare our students to transition from high school to a state college or university. Upon successful completion of these courses, students will receive immediate credit for each course statewide and realize that they are capable of completing technical college or university coursework.

#### **Benefits of BRIDGE to All**

The BRIDGE Act benefits our state in many ways. The biggest benefit is for our workforce, as Georgia industries and companies will have a greater pool of future employees that have the essential technical skills, leadership qualities, and work experiences. Students will benefit because they will graduate high school with the college and career readiness skills essential to have a successful future. They will also benefit by seeing the relevance of what they’re learning and how it applies to their future career and goals.

Schools will benefit from the BRIDGE Act by having more students graduate high school ready to enter college or a career while reducing the drop-out rate. And, parents will benefit by being involved in their student’s education and understanding the connection between high school courses and future career opportunities for their child.

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#### **Flexibility and Opportunities begin in Middle School**

All of these benefits will result in Georgia having a more educated, better qualified and stronger workforce to support our growing economy.

These middle school CTAE programs align to high school CTAE program areas and give students many options to choose specific Career Pathways. Each Career Pathway consists of three or four courses for students to complete during high school. A tremendous result of students completing courses aligned to a Career Pathway is the student can earn a nationally recognized industry credential. This credential documents the technical skills the student is able to do when they enter Georgia's workforce.

While choosing a Career Pathway and being ready to earn a national credential is important, the primary point to remember is that students can and will change their minds while in high school about their career choices. Making sure that their decisions are based on career interest inventory data and solid reasoning for changing their career focus is crucial. We need to ensure we use our state resources to adequately prepare our students to make the best choice after graduation, no matter what that choice is.

As the student gets older, more choices and options will be available. Students will find that there are many adults dedicated to helping them make good career and academic choices that will lead them to their career goal as a member and leader in the Georgia workforce.

The ultimate goal of the BRIDGE Act is to ensure that our secondary and postsecondary schools are working together to prepare and provide our great state with solid, educated workers with the soft skills and work ethic necessary to grow our state economically and responsibly. Working together, we will Build Resourceful Individuals to Develop Georgia's Economy.