

Chandler Unified Switching to Job-Focused Curriculum

Ray Parker, The Arizona Republic

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Chandler Unified is placing a new emphasis on preparing students for careers in the workplace, starting with new classes for junior high students.

State lawmakers changed the standards that begin this school year, replacing the Family and Consumer Science elective for seventh- and eighth-graders with a new class called Career Exploration.

To make the switch, the school board on Wednesday approved buying a \$16,725 program called *Career Choices* by Academic Innovations, which will debut in the district's five junior high schools.

The new standards reflect an educational trend away from home economics and toward skills for the workforce, especially for girls.

"In seventh grade, they'll explore various careers, and in eighth grade, they'll come up with a five-year plan for graduating high school and have a portfolio (with their career assessments and plan)," said Jennifer Latin, who will move from Basha High to Bogle Junior High, where she'll teach the new career classes.

"We're really trying to prepare kids for the community (workforce) and not so much for the home. Times are changing," Latin said.

The elective classes will teach students about what careers suit their personalities along with "life skills," such as working in teams and presenting themselves in the best way during job interviews.

The new classes also will emphasize students thinking in long-term ways about high school and beyond.

"It's too late to wait until high school," said Meg Gianesello, Chandler Unified's director of instructional services. "(The new classes) will allow students to map

out a 10-year plan." We'll also integrate our (school) counselors."

Last year at Basha High, Latin taught what's was known as a Life Connection elective class, where students would go through mock job interviews, learn about inflation and its effects on salary, among other activities.

The idea was to use math for everyday situations. Latin explained one activity involved students buying a car, but using math to figure out its ultimate cost when factoring in interest on the car loan.

"(The new state) standards are pushing those activities into the junior high level," Latin said. "The main purpose is to show students what skills they need to be successful . . . and keeping kids in school by showing a more cohesive picture of high school."

She added that students often have unrealistic ideas about what it takes to make it to the top.

"They want to be the next Michael Jordan, but have no idea what skills he needed to become successful," she said.

District administrators have flexibility in how they implement the new state standards so CUSD officials were unsure if other districts had bought the Academic Innovations program.

At the junior high schools, elective classes meet for 70 minutes every other day. Students also can sign up for electives that include art, band and orchestra.