Project SEARCH Course Standards Approval

The Background:

T.C.A. § 49-1-302(a)(8) authorizes the State Board of Education to "set policies governing all academic standards and courses of study in the public schools." Additionally, State Board Rule 0520-01-03-.05(1) calls for the State Board to adopt standards for each subject area, grades K-12. The approved standards are to be the basis for planning instructional programs in each local school system.

This item presents course standards for a new course, Project SEARCH. The Project SEARCH Transition-to-Work Program is a unique, business-led, employment preparation program for students with disabilities following their first four years of high school and takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. The program culminates in individualized job development, and 98 percent of Project SEARCH students secure employment upon completion of the program. The school Project SEARCH program requires a partnership between a business and a school district with rigorous expectations that must be adequately demonstrated to officially become a Project SEARCH site.

In order for a student to participate in Project SEARCH, the student must apply and be accepted to the program. Acceptance to Project SEARCH is competitive and determined by both the school and employer. Upon acceptance to the program, the student's IEP team will meet to ensure supports and services needed to benefit from the Project SEARCH program are in place. All programs are supported by district-hired, licensed special education teachers who hold a work-based learning certificate.

Currently, 10 school districts in Tennessee have achieved the necessary partnerships and have successful Project SEARCH programs. A specific course code for Project SEARCH participation is needed to allow schools to schedule students consistently and transparently, provide clear communication to parents about the student's day, and offer data regarding the impact of participation, including the student's postsecondary employment success as defined in the Best For All Department strategic plan.

The course requirements proposed for alignment to the new course are from the Project SEARCH employability skills curriculum that must be followed in each Project SEARCH site.

Minor clerical changes were made between first and final reading.

The Fiscal Analysis Impact:

T.C.A. § 49-1-212 requires that the Department prepare a fiscal analysis of any policy, rule, or regulation proposed to the State Board of Education. This item has no financial impact on an LEA.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends approval of this item on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.