

# Move On When Ready:

**New Legislation Provides Arizona Public Schools with College and Career-Readiness Tools and Support**

**By Sybil Francis, Ph.D.**



It is more important than ever for students to pursue their education beyond high school if they hope to compete in the highly competitive international economy. By 2013 less than 2 percent of new high-growth jobs in Arizona that pay a livable wage will be open to students who do not have at least a high school diploma. At the same time, high school graduation rates have stalled at about 70 percent nationally for 40 years, and for those students who do enroll in postsecondary education, nearly 60 percent require remedial coursework in math and/or English in community college. Those numbers are even higher in Arizona. In order to offer our students a better chance for a promising future we need system-level change. The recent passage of the Move On When Ready legislation (HB2731) does just that.

Move On When Ready is designed to raise academic achievement for all students to national and international standards and prepare them to a college-ready level. Students who demonstrate readiness for college through participation in board examination systems can earn a performance-based high school diploma, the Grand Canyon Diploma, as early as age 16, which offers multiple high-value education options.

Far from setting low expectations and fast-tracking students to high school graduation, earning the new Grand Canyon Diploma will prepare students well beyond today's graduation requirements.

## **The Legislation**

The Move On When Ready legislation retains all current options open to students for high school study while providing new, completely voluntary options and tools for schools and students to:

- Raise academic achievement for all students to national and international standards.
- Allow students to advance based on their demonstrated learning rather than on seat time in class.
- Provide students with multiple, high-value education options within and beyond the high school setting once they demonstrate they are ready for community college without remediation.
- Offer students who demonstrate readiness for community college work, and/or career and technical-level work, the Grand Canyon Diploma as early as the end of their sophomore year.

The Grand Canyon Diploma is designed to help all students achieve their career goals of a license, associate's degree or bachelor's degree on a solid academic foundation, opening doors closed to many students today.

To earn a Grand Canyon Diploma, students must participate in board examination systems and demonstrate readiness for college-level math and English according to standards prescribed by an interstate board examination systems consortium. Students also must have passing grades on an additional set of required, approved board examination courses. These courses will be determined by the Arizona State Board of Education as early as this fall.

Participating schools will offer at least one lower division board examination system to incoming freshmen. The participating schools will continue to receive a substantial portion of the per pupil funding for students who qualify

for the Grand Canyon Diploma and move on to approved postsecondary study until that student would otherwise have graduated at the end of grade 12. Those funds may be utilized by schools to provide student and teacher incentives, customized programs of support for struggling students, and to help offset the cost of the board examination systems.

### Board Examination Systems

Despite the name, board examinations are not just another test. Board examination systems are complete instructional systems that are used around the world and in the United States in many of the most successful educational systems in existence. While they will require students to far exceed what is currently expected of them through AIMS, they are not elite systems. They are designed to successfully prepare all students to high academic standards.

Board examinations are available for all subjects, ranging from the standard academic courses, to physical education, music and art, as well as career and technical courses. They are comprehensive in their approach and include the following components: a coherent group of courses that constitute a core curriculum at the high school level; a comprehensive syllabus for each course; appropriate instructional and teaching materials for each course; high-quality examinations that are closely aligned with the course syllabus; professional scoring of examinations; and teacher engagement and professional development that is designed to train teachers to successfully teach those courses.

Providers of these internationally recognized board examination systems include ACT QualityCore, Cambridge International Examinations, Edexcel/Pearson, College Board and International Baccalaureate.

### Student Options

Students who pass these criteria would qualify to earn a Grand Canyon Diploma and could graduate as early as age 16, if they are prepared and if their families agree.

Options available to graduates include:

- Remaining in high school and enrolling in an upper level of board examination systems designed to prepare students for entrance to selective baccalaureate-degree granting institutions such as Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, the University of Arizona, as well as other universities across the nation.
- Graduating early and enrolling in full-time community college courses on the students' current high school campus or on a community college campus.
- Enrolling in a full-time career and technical education program leading to an industry certification. These programs may be offered on a community college campus, a high school campus or a joint technical education district campus – or any combination of these campuses.

Students who take the exam at the end of their sophomore year in high school but do not qualify to earn a Grand Canyon

Diploma will remain in high school and have the opportunity to continue to work toward the diploma.

### Next Steps

Passage of the Arizona legislation has cleared the way for a year of planning in which the model will be further developed and refined prior to its implementation in early adopter schools in fall 2011.

The Center for the Future of Arizona, which played a key role in bringing the Move On When Ready concept to Arizona and in the passage of HB2731, will continue to work collaboratively with education partners across the state to lead the planning year. This initial work was supported in large part by Arizona's philanthropic community. Key partners include Helios Education Foundation, the Arizona Community Foundation, the Rodel Charitable Foundation of Arizona, Sundt Foundation and the John Whiteman Foundation.

In May, the Center for the Future of Arizona hosted a statewide summit which launched the planning year. It featured presentations by the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE), which is leading the national Move On When Ready effort, and several board examination providers. The event was attended by more than 150 people representing PreK-12, philanthropy, business and industry, higher education and elected officials.

In addition, the Center for the Future of Arizona has met with school and district representatives interested in becoming early adopters, hosted an informational symposium series featuring three board examination system providers, and is holding teacher focus groups throughout the state to obtain feedback regarding the Move On When Ready model, curriculum and assessments.

The Center for the Future of Arizona also is working to secure federal and foundation grants to support any start-up costs for early adopter schools. In collaboration with the NCEE State Consortium on Board Examination Systems, Arizona has already submitted two federal grants. If awarded, Arizona stands to gain just over \$4 million to support schools in implementing the Move On When Ready model.

Move On When Ready offers tremendous opportunity for our students in Arizona. The Center for the Future of Arizona is excited about the significant progress made and looks forward to continuing this work in close collaboration with partners nationally and across the state. We welcome the opportunity to discuss with interested individuals and organizations ways in which they can engage in and support this work. ■

***About the writer:** Sybil Francis, Ph.D., is executive director for the Center for the Future of Arizona, a Phoenix-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that combines public-policy research with collaborative partnerships and initiatives to address issues critical to the state. CFA serves as the state's liaison with the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), which is leading the national Move On When Ready effort. Contact her at [Sybil.Francis@asu.edu](mailto:Sybil.Francis@asu.edu) or visit [www.arizonafuture.org](http://www.arizonafuture.org) for more information.*