



# Career & Technical Education

By Dr. Denise Jonas, Director of Career & Technical Education

## A Focus on Choice Ready Graduates

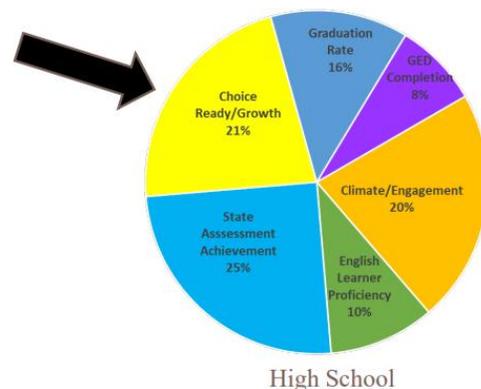
As Director of Career and Technical Education, I am often asked what Fargo Public Schools (FPS) is doing to help students become prepared for life after high school. For every student, this 13-year journey from elementary to middle school, and middle school to high school is a slow process. It can feel like a mirage as students and parents/guardians navigate their way to graduation. However, I would like to imagine this experience a bit more like Santa's workshop, where a team of elves is working diligently behind the scenes throughout the years to create events that will provide a memorable learning experience for each student, and the gift to graduate "Choice Ready."

You may be wondering, what is ["Choice Ready?"](#) According to the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, *"Choice Ready is a new component in the North Dakota Accountability system to measure whether our high schools are producing students who are ready for success upon graduation."* For high school, metrics are based on a growth model in four categories outlined in the [ND Choice Ready Chart](#) including:

- **Essential Skills**
- **Post-Secondary Ready**
- **Work Ready (Career)**
- **Military Ready**

Although Choice Ready is only one measure in North Dakota's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan, I perceive it to be a critical one! Choice Ready embraces the philosophy of a well-rounded learner, recognizing talents in multiple areas and requiring schools to focus on more than one pathway for student success. This is a welcome shift from the previous No Child Left Behind act which focused predominantly on literacy and math to measure student success.

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The FPS mission of “achieving excellence by educating and empowering all students to succeed” and its [Strategic Plan](#) are at the core of preparing students to become Choice Ready.

Over the years, essential skills have been at the heart of the FPS curriculum and student achievement. FPS middle school and high school counselors have integrated self-awareness lessons, interest inventories, and guidance activities, along with college and career fairs to create awareness and introduce students to high school and post-secondary options. Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses in areas such as automotive, construction, culinary, childcare, education, business, marketing, entrepreneurship, manufacturing, robotics, engineering, computer programming, and graphics communication have provided in-school career-based experiences to expose students to areas of career interest. Well–rounded and STEAM experiences in the arts, core curriculums, music, world languages, leadership, military, volunteerism, along with extra-curricular, and co-curricular have set the stage for FPS to produce Choice Ready graduates.

However, Fargo Public Schools also recognizes more can be done to increase the number of Choice Ready graduates, not only for success in the eyes of ND DPI, but for the life-long success of its learners. This year, FPS has turned its focus on four major activities to increase attention on Choice Ready efforts:

## 1) Analysis of ND Choice Ready metrics and FPS high school results,



With funding from the ND DPI Choice Ready Grant, Mr. Andrew Dahlen, has moved from retired principal to part-time Choice Ready Program Manager for 2021-22. Mr. Dahlen will be working with principals, counselors, career advisors, district leaders, data specialists, and DPI to assist with analysis of the Choice Ready metrics and determine current performance levels at each high school. His work will also generate a consistent process for FPS Career Advisors and Counselors to accurately and efficiently collect student data which may need to be obtained through self-reporting

of some metrics. The goal is to use this data to design activities to better prepare students while they are in high school and increase Choice Ready graduates versus waiting until post-graduation to analyze results.

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## 2) Implementation of Career Advisor supports at each high school,

To increase its focus on career education and Choice Ready activities, FPS has transformed its previous career paraeducator positions to Career Advisors at each high school. With oversight from the Department of Career and Technical Education, and their counseling department, a [Career Advisor](#) is a person who incorporates career development as a focus for high school career lessons and serves as a resource to students, parents/guardian, or school staff. FPS Career Advisors will also work to coordinate Choice Ready activities such as: college visits, Workforce Wednesdays, job shadows, support for ACT, ASVAB, and Work Keys testing, Choice Ready monitoring, and middle school transition support. All Career Advisor have an approved teaching license and completed training for career development, Choice Ready, R U Ready, ASCA training, and will complete Ignite training this fall.



**Joshua Schreier**

**Dakota High School**



**Jody Jahner**

**Davies High School**



**Lisa Metzger**

**North High School**



**Corin Strapp**

**South High School**

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## 3) School-based activities to prepare students for Choice Ready success,

Based on individual school Choice Ready results from 2021, each high school has earmarked activities to increase focus and preparation for students in lagging areas. The following are examples of Choice Ready activities already held, but not limited to, launched this fall:

- Dakota High School - Workforce Wednesdays, awareness posters, post-secondary visit
- Davies High School - core teacher student support, Choice Ready campaign, college visits
- North High School - Saturday AP prep, college preview, ACT prep, Work Keys fees
- South High School - College preview field trips, dual credit fees, ACT Prep, BARR training

## 4) K-12 school counselor training in the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) standards and program evaluation for reflection and alignment of the system.



During the 2021-2022 school year, 41 FPS K-12 counselors will participate in four, half-day ASCA training sessions through the University of Mary Graduate Counseling Program. Jim Keal, Dakota High School Assistant Principal and Fargo Counseling Program Coordinator, organized the training to upskill new and existing counselors around changes in the [ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success](#). Through this work, counselors will reflect on current practice, realign the K-12 counseling program where needed, and align Choice Ready metrics and activities where appropriate.

Fargo Public Schools is committed to “Achieving excellence by educating and empowering all students to succeed” with a focus on Choice Ready graduates. Please connect with your school’s principal, counselor, career advisor, or teacher to learn more about activities happening throughout the year.

