Linked Learning
Pathway Certification Criteria

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Purpose

This Pathway Certification Criteria document is intended to serve multiple purposes. *For pathway team members* seeking certification, it serves as a guide to build, improve, and sustain high-quality pathways. *For members of a certification review team*, it lists the essential criteria that reviewers will focus on during certification visits and provides a guide from which to make commendations and recommendations. *For others—educational leaders, industry and postsecondary partners, policymakers, and community members*—it serves to deepen understanding by describing the elements of a high-quality pathway. Although pathways may vary in their structure and delivery, it is expected that any pathway seeking certification would adhere to the mission and guiding principles and incorporate the core components (all listed below). Pathways that implement creative approaches may meet the criteria by demonstrating how they address the spirit of the criteria.

Mission

Pathways are a strategy to prepare participating students for college and career through equitable access to quality programs that link rigorous academics, demanding technical content, and authentic work-based experiences.

Guiding Principles

1. Pathways prepare students for postsecondary education and careers.
2. Pathways connect academics to real-world applications.
3. Pathways lead to a full range of postsecondary opportunities.
4. Pathways improve students' achievement.

Core Components

1. **A challenging academic component** prepares students for success—without remediation—in California's community colleges and universities, as well as in apprenticeships and other postsecondary programs.
2. **A demanding technical component** delivers concrete knowledge and skills through a cluster of four or more technical courses.
3. **A work-based learning component** offers opportunities for students to learn through real-world experiences.
4. **Support services** include counseling; supplemental instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics; and other services to help students succeed with a challenging program of study.

Quality Criteria

1. PATHWAY DESIGN

The pathway is designed with a structure, governance, and program that provide all students with opportunities for both postsecondary and career success.

1.1 Design Structure	1.1.1. **Pathway theme:** The pathway represents a broad theme that can appeal to and engage a student, regardless of his or her prior academic achievement and postsecondary aspirations. The theme has been thoughtfully selected based on the student's interest and several other criteria, which may include teacher expertise, regional workforce needs, existence of related career and technical education (CTE) course sequences, articulation opportunities with nearby postsecondary institutions, and the interest of industry partners.
	1.1.2. **Program of study:** A 3- or 4-year industry -themed pathway serves as the organizational structure for a 4-year high school program of study. By design, it links core academics with technical content at each grade level. The curriculum is sequenced and coordinated.
	1.1.3. **Student recruitment and selection:** The pathway's student recruitment and selection process is formalized and ensures open access to students who volunteer for the pathway based on their interests. Pathway demographics reflect those of the school and district.
	1.1.4. **Cohort scheduling:** Pathway students participate as a cohort in the academic and technical courses that are part of the program of study to enable flexible use of class time and instructional methodologies that promote multidisciplinary projects.
	1.1.5. **Staff collaboration:** School and pathway leadership nurtures a professional learning community among staff that encourages frequent and effective collaboration for program coordination, curricular integration, and resolution of student issues and concerns.
	1.1.6. **Pathway preparation and orientation:** The pathway provides an orientation and other transition services for incoming students preferably beginning in middle school and involving parents.
	1.1.7. **Postsecondary articulation:** The pathway promotes a seamless transition to postsecondary education and training opportunities through articulation agreements, dual-enrollment, and other formal and informal activities.
1.2 Governance	1.2.1. **Advisory board with broad representation:** An active advisory board meets regularly to set policies, develop resources, and advise the program of study. It includes representation from involved employers, students, parents, higher education and community partners, pathway staff, and district and site administrators.

2. ENGAGED LEARNING

In supportive learning communities, students meet technical and academic standards and college entrance requirements through real-world applications, integrated project-/problem-based instruction, authentic assessments, and work-based learning.

2.1 Standards-Aligned Curriculum	2.1.1. **Academic core:** The academic curriculum is aligned to state standards and designed to lead to student mastery on standardized tests as well as on more authentic assessment measures.
	2.1.2. **Technical core:** The pathway includes a 3- to 4-year sequence or cluster of technical coursework aligned to state CTE and/or industry standards.
2.2 Preparation for Postsecondary Options	2.2.1. **Postsecondary preparatory curriculum:** A pathway prepares students for success—without remediation—in California's community colleges, universities, apprenticeships, and other postsecondary programs.
	2.2.2. **Technical component:** A sequence or cluster of at least three or four technical courses delivers basic and advanced industry knowledge and skills. Its focus is on preparing youth for high-skill, high-wage employment by emphasizing industry-related knowledge and skills, using authentic applications that bring learning to life.
2.3 Real-World Relevance	2.3.1. **Real-world relevance:** Academic core courses deliver standards-based content through authentic, career-related applications. Pathways alter how core academic subjects are taught; they do not lower expectations about what is taught.
2.4 Integrated Curriculum	2.4.1. **Multidisciplinary integrated curriculum:** Pathway students participate in multidisciplinary projects that integrate academic and technical course content.
	2.4.2. **Curricular alignment:** Teachers collaborate within and across disciplines and grade levels to provide students with a coordinated, coherent curriculum.
2.5 Instruction and Assessment	2.5.1. **Project-/Problem-based approach:** Inquiry-based instruction enables students to experience authentic theme-based situations that require integrating knowledge and skills from several disciplines. This approach fosters communication and teamwork skills, among other Habits of Mind, Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), and 21st-Century Skills.
	2.5.2. **Authentic assessment:** To complement traditional or standardized student assessments, pathway teachers design and use a variety of assessments to gain an accurate understanding of student learning. Assessments include opportunities for students to demonstrate skills through authentic applications.

2.6 Work-Based Learning (WBL)	2.6.1.	**Coordinated, sequenced, and scaled:** The pathway offers real-world learning opportunities through a 4-year coordinated and structured sequence of work-based learning (WBL) experiences that progresses in duration, intensity, and student expectations and independence. The sequence leads to an extended, intensive work-related experience such as an internship or school-based enterprise.
	2.6.2.	**Connected to academic and technical coursework:** Work-based learning (WBL) experiences do not occur in a vacuum; they are connected to and reinforce classroom learning.
2.7 Support Services and Personalization	2.7.1.	**Supportive atmosphere:** The pathway maintains personalization through limited size, teacher teamwork, and strong teacher-student relationships.
	2.7.2.	**Student engagement:** Pathway staff consciously and consistently work to create a culture where students are actively engaged in their learning, both in and out of the school setting.
	2.7.3.	**Differentiated instruction:** Daily instruction is designed with the knowledge that students vary in their preferred method of gaining information and understanding ideas. Teachers use multiple methods of presenting course content to address each student's learning needs.
	2.7.4.	**Academic intervention:** Pathway students performing below grade level are supported by a range of services, which may include supplemental instruction, tutoring, credit recovery, before- and/or after-school programs, and academic support programs.
	2.7.5.	**Guidance and counseling:** The pathway has a designated counselor who knows pathway students and is familiar with the unique characteristics and needs of the pathway.
	2.7.6.	**College and career planning:** Each pathway student has a multi-year college and career plan that is informed by a range of college and career planning activities, extends through high school, and guides decisions about postsecondary education, training, and career pursuits.

3. SYSTEM SUPPORT

District policies and practices provide leadership, support, and resources to establish and sustain quality pathways.

3.1 District Policies	3.1.1.	**Pathway choice, equity, and access:** District, school, and pathway policies and procedures support pathway development, implementation, and sustainability, including allowing students to select pathway options; ensure equity in placement of students in pathways; and ensure that transportation issues do not preclude students from participating in the pathway of their choice.
	3.1.2.	**Recruitment and hiring practices:** District policies and practices value the recruitment, hiring, retention, and evaluation of pathway team members, as well as the need for pathway staff stability that supports ongoing pathway maturation and sustainability.
	3.1.3.	**Accountability and autonomy:** District policies hold school sites and pathways accountable for improving student outcomes and allow for site and pathway autonomy in determining the curriculum, instructional methodologies, pacing, and scheduling that will result in reaching those outcomes.
3.2 Leadership	3.2.1.	**Support from school board and Superintendent:** The district Board of Education and Superintendent are strong proponents of a pathways approach, publicly endorse it, offer active support, and align resources and procedures to promote pathway quality and sustainability.
	3.2.2.	**Support from site leadership:** The high school principal and other administrators publicly advocate for the pathway and are actively involved in its funding, facilities, staffing, scheduling, and support. Site leaders have a common understanding of, vision for, and commitment to pathways and their potential to reduce high school dropout rates, raise student achievement, increase high school completion and postsecondary transition, and boost students' earning power.
3.3 Professional Development	3.3.1.	**Teacher professional development:** Site and district administrators provide or help arrange training for pathway teachers in curricular integration, project-/problem-based teaching strategies, student support, and employer involvement, among other areas.
3.4 Qualified Staff	3.4.1.	**Skilled teachers:** Because a pathway's success rests on good teaching and teamwork among a cross-disciplinary group of teachers, site principals must hire and/or assign qualified and willing teachers to fulfill this role.
	3.4.2.	**Teacher leader/pathway coordinator:** A pathway teacher has agreed to serve as the pathway leader/coordinator who is responsible for all pathway administrative and facilitative functions. Release time is provided for this role.

| 3.5 Partnerships | 3.5.1. | **Active employer and community partnerships:** The pathway has strong partnerships with local employers, community groups, and individuals. Both through the advisory board and other interactions, there is evidence of a healthy partnership between the pathway/high school and its host community. |

4. EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A systemic evaluation process documents the pathway's impact on high school achievement and post-secondary success and drives the pathway's continuous improvement plans.

4.1 Student Data	4.1.1.	**Data collection and reporting:** The pathway regularly collects, analyzes, and accurately reports student assessment data, including those necessary to describe pathway participants (e.g., grade level, gender, race/ethnicity), to make comparisons to the demographic data of the school and district and to report students' performance on a variety of outcome measures.
	4.1.2.	**College and career readiness data:** The pathway collects, analyzes, and reports on available indicators of both college and career readiness, which may include a-g completion rates, college enrollment data, SAT data, GPAs, CST scores, CAHSEE pass rates, graduation and dropout rates, pathway completion, occupational certification, proficiency through demonstration, completion of and grades in capstone technical courses, and end-of-course exams.
4.2 Pathway Evaluation	4.2.1.	**Evidence of impact:** Ongoing, regular analysis of pathway data is used to make programmatic decisions and inform instructional practice. Such analysis shows whether pathways retain their students and whether, and by how much, the pathway improves student performance.
	4.2.2.	**Periodic review and improvement plan:** Pathway staff and the advisory board regularly assess the pathway's functioning. These periodic reviews result in the development of an improvement plan, whose action items refer back to the pathway's underlying mission and goals.
	4.2.3.	**Postsecondary tracking:** Pathway staff conduct a formal follow-up of students for several years after high school graduation and use data collected for continuous improvement of the pathway.