

## ***SIGNATURE ELEMENTS OF A HIGH QUALITY ACADEMY/PATHWAY COURSE DESCRIPTION***

High quality courses provide a teaching and learning experience that effectively prepares students with the knowledge, skills, and habits that are vital to their success in college, career, and life. In an Academy/ pathway context, courses reflect the following signature elements:

**Rigor:** A rigorous academy/pathway course integrates relevant academic, career-technical, and industry standards. It involves learning experiences that are personally and intellectually challenging, and enable students to acquire skills that can be applied in different education, career, civic, and life contexts. Rigorous learning experiences encourage students to think critically and creatively through research, analysis, and problem solving. They also stimulate students, motivate them to learn more, and prepare them for postsecondary options without need for remediation. When appropriate, rigorous courses should enable students to earn postsecondary credit.

**Relevance:** Relevant learning experiences involve connections to student interests, aspirations, life experiences, and cultures. They also involve skill acquisition, the application of knowledge in practical contexts, and community and career connections. Relevant learning experiences often have value beyond the classroom, and frequently mirror postsecondary and professional work. A course may use a variety of educational strategies to increase relevance, including an emphasis on 21st century skills, community and work-based learning, personalized learning, project-based learning, and cultural competency. Relevant course descriptions are also closely aligned to the pathway theme and often include demonstrations of technical mastery and professional skills (through preparation for industry-recognized certifications, where relevant).

**Authentic Assessment:** Academy/pathway courses include performance and/or portfolio assessments, in addition to more traditional formative and summative assessments. As part of the assessment of learning, students often engage in complex tasks similar to those encountered by practitioners in the discipline or career field. Academy/pathway students are expected to defend their attainment of standards, demonstrate growth and mastery, and reflect on themselves as learners. Where feasible and appropriate, these assessments should include genuine roles for industry professionals and community partners, whether as mentors, supervisors, clients, or evaluators.

**Interdisciplinary Learning:** According to the National Council for Teachers of English “educational experiences are more authentic and of greater value to students when the curricula reflects real life, which is multi-faceted rather than being compartmentalized into neat subject-matter packages.” Academy/pathway courses use project-based and/or inquiry-based approaches to integrate academic content and methodologies from multiple subjects with technical content and methodologies from industry sectors. Academy/pathway courses help students make connections between disciplines and between school, work, and community.

**Integrated Work-Based Learning:** Work-based learning plays an essential role in supporting pathway student learning outcomes and the attainment of 21st century skills. As appropriate, a sequence of work-based learning opportunities is embedded in academy/pathway courses. Ideally, these experiences build awareness of career options, enable exploration of careers of interest, and provide practical experience that links classroom learning to workplace applications. Integrated work-based learning also involves student interaction with industry professionals who support and enhance learning experiences in both classrooms and at work sites.

**Student Agency:** Student ownership of the learning experience is important for academic engagement, social-emotional and 21st century skill development, and content mastery. Learning experiences should be designed to promote agency, efficacy, entrepreneurship, and a sense of purpose among students. Academy/pathway courses include student-directed learning that empowers students to take initiative and responsibility as they explore interests, set goals, and make informed decisions.

**Preparation for College and Career:** Academy/pathway courses include opportunities for students to advance their college and career knowledge, develop evidence of college and career readiness, and publicly defend their mastery of content and skills critical to college and career success. As appropriate, learning experiences integrate college and career exploration, planning, and portfolio development to prepare students for college and job application processes (ex. resume writing, labor market research, mock interviews, personal statements, etc.). These experiences include the active involvement of counselors, alumni, and postsecondary or employer partners, as appropriate, to provide guidance, feedback, and support.

**Equity and Access:** Pre-requisites included in course descriptions exist to ensure student success, rather than unnecessarily restrict student access to high-quality instruction. Academy/pathway students are encouraged to pursue challenging courses, and teaching supports the success of all students towards skill and content mastery.

*NOTE: Other possible Signature Elements include:*

- *Authentic Industry/Postsecondary Partner Roles in support of student learning*
- *Student Reflections on learning*
- *Professional Use of technology*

*Your brilliant suggestions, ideas, and edits for Signature Elements are much appreciated.*