



PREPARING OUR STUDENTS FOR PROFESSIONS OF THE FUTURE

October 2016

White Paper

INTRODUCTION

The Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) is committed to graduating each student with Diploma+, giving them the experience and skills necessary for college and careers in a global society. This commitment grows out of a decades-long systemic transformation of teaching and learning in KCKPS. While the work of Diploma+ is challenging, the district has laid the groundwork to make this change.

HISTORY

In 1996, the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) took the first, hesitant steps on what has become a remarkable journey. In what felt at the time like an incredibly risky move, the district laid student performance data out for all to see. Many who were in that room remember an audible gasp, when participants realized that only 11% of students were proficient in reading, and 3% were proficient in math.

Over the next 15 years, KCKPS went from approximately 11% and 3% of its students meeting the standard in reading and math, to almost 70% meeting the standard in 2011. The story of this improvement, which is unique among public school districts in the country, is the story of the First Things First (FTF) reform effort.

FTF, which was fully implemented in the district in 2000, was based, not on a specific curriculum adoption or school-based reform, but on a district-wide commitment to a set of principles, known as the Seven Critical Features. These principles continued to serve as the district's foundation for improvement, and to inform the district's decisions over a fifteen-year period.

Initially, the Critical Features were front and center in the work of the district. District schools organized themselves in order to provide all students with four conditions which research and experience have shown to be critical to their success:

1. Provide lower student/adult ratio during core instructional periods
2. Provide continuity of care across the school day, across school years, and between school and home
3. Set high, clear and fair academic and behavioral standards that clearly define what students will know and be able to do
4. Provide enriched and diverse opportunities to learn, perform and be recognized.

In addition, schools worked to provide three conditions for adults, in order to:

5. Assure collective responsibility for improvement in student performance
6. Provide instructional autonomy and support
7. Allow for flexible allocation of available resources

Over the years, as the work of the district progressed, these seven critical features became distilled into three goals: *strengthen instruction*, *strengthen relationships*, and make sure that *all resources in the district are focused on the first two*.

DISTRICT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Building on the success of First Thinks First, we are now in the midst of another pivotal period in the evolution of our work. During the 2010-11 school year, we engaged in deep study of the research on school and district improvement, coming to rely on the meta-analytical work of Robert Marzano Ph.D., and Timothy Waters Ph.D., as published in “District Leadership that Works” (2007). At the same time, the superintendent, along with members of her council, engaged in a series of listening tours throughout the community to determine what was most important to consider as the district implemented strategies for continuous improvement.

The opportunity to listen to parents, students, business, community members, and teachers reinforced a “pleased but not satisfied” consensus about the performance of the school district. Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) has, over time, made steady improvements in student performance on state reading and math assessments. Even so, large percentages of students continue to perform below standard on national assessments such as the Northwest Evaluation Assessment of Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), and the college readiness measures of ACT-EXPLORE, ACT-PLAN, and ACT®. Research validates that performance on state assessments has not been an accurate predictor, and that the nationally normed assessments are better indicators of college and career success. Improved performance on the state assessments has not reduced the socio-economic/opportunity gap that exists between our community and other more advantaged communities.

OPPORTUNITY GAP - The socio-economic/opportunity gap is a gap in opportunities for students to be fully prepared to compete for middle class-wage jobs on the local, state, nation, and global stage. The vast majority of students in Kansas City, Kansas (KCK) face significant economic challenges. Ninety-percent of the students in KCKPS qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Only 50% of three and four year olds in KCK have access to high-quality early childhood programs. The unemployment rate for Kansas City, Kansas was 7.4% in 2014 (50% higher than the state rate.)

The economic challenges in KCK are manifest in the post-secondary outcomes of district students. The district 4-year graduation rate in 2015 was 69%. The number of graduates enrolled in post-secondary education in 2013 was 57.9%, with 24.9% attending 4-year institutions, and 29.2% attending two-year institutions. The percentage of students persisting to a degree or certification was 21% in 2008.

Some characterize the challenges faced by KCKPS students as insurmountable. Students from urban school districts are not expected to succeed. However, KCKPS has cast aside such thinking, and believes that intentional and purposeful actions on the part of educators will diminish the impact of poverty. The district is working with urgency to

close the gap many students face between their current circumstance and the level of education and training necessary in the 21st Century to reach the American Dream. These efforts to bridge the opportunity gap have been branded as Diploma+, addressed later in this document.

SYSTEMIC REFORM – Tackling the disparities that created the opportunity gap requires leadership that will paint a new landscape of possibilities for district students. It requires the district to engage in reform that is systemic and comprehensive. Central to the formation of district actions has been the willingness to think outside of the box and allow for true innovation, and to find multiple methods to meet the diverse needs of students. Key actions include:

- Adoption of a vision, mission, and goal that focus on excellence;
- Implementation of a district continuous improvement plan;
- Adoption of an explicit focus literacy, including reading, writing, speaking, and reasoning across the content;
- Alignment of the curriculum to college and career readiness standards;
- Expansion of early childhood education; and
- Implementation of Diploma+.

The following sections briefly describe each of the key actions implemented to make a difference in the lives of district students, and to change economic outcomes for the KCK community.

VISION, MISSION, AND GOAL –Education is a core value in the Kansas City, Kansas community. Providing the best possible education to all children was (and is) the clear expectation. KCKPS was already recognized as a good urban school district. Still, it had the courage to ask: “Is this the best we can do?” The answer was clearly “No.” The vision, ***“striving to become one of the top 10 districts in the nation,”*** reflects the importance of education in Kansas City, Kansas.

The mission had to speak to how the district would work toward achieving its vision. Again, by asking stakeholders to talk about how the district could strive to be among the best educational systems in the nation, the mission was formed. That mission, ***“Inspiring Excellence: Every Grownup, Every Child, Every Day,”*** clearly directs the district’s collective responsibility to ensure students’ success.

Vision and mission statements are frequently little more than words on paper in many organizations. Not in KCKPS. The vision and mission demand actions that were and are worthy of such audacious aspirations. It was vital that the district establish a goal that defined what it means to be one of the top 10 school districts in the nation. The essential district goal is that ***“each student will exit high school prepared for college and careers in a global society, and at every level, performance is on-track and on-time for success.”*** The words “each,” “prepared for college and careers,” “in a global society,” and “performance is on-track and on-time,” frame everything that happens now in KCKPS.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT – Developing the vision, mission, and goal was only the beginning. In 2010, working alongside various stakeholder groups, the district drafted the first District Continuous Improvement Plan (DCIP). The Board of Education approved the plan, and aligned fiscal and human resources to support its implementation. The DCIP is crafted to focus on continuous growth and improvement of instruction, leading to the **Essential Goal**.

HIGHLY LITERATE CITIZENS - A year into the reform, it was clear that the district needed to look deeply at its literacy practices, pre-school through 12th grade. In the fall of 2011, the district engaged the American Institute of Research (AIR) to conduct a comprehensive literacy audit. The audit resulted in key findings that are now central in the District Literacy Plan. Millions of dollars were spent to establish classroom libraries across the district. Intensive system-wide professional learning has transformed classrooms, preschool through grade twelve, into literacy rich environments. Today, it is not unusual, when walking into any classroom, to see students fully engaged in reading, writing, speaking about, or engaged in discussions of rich literature.

In addition to supporting and expecting every teacher to infuse literacy in their instructional practices, the district has implemented “Literacy Lab” classrooms and Targeted Literacy Instructors. Literacy Lab teachers are selected to serve as models for a comprehensive literacy day in preschool through sixth grade. The Lab teachers meet bi-monthly to study the research, discuss dilemmas and share instructional strategies. The Lab teachers co-teach with a reading specialist, and keep reflective journals about their practices. The Lab classrooms serve as models for teachers, throughout the district, to observe classrooms engaged in comprehensive literacy instruction throughout the day. Data from these classrooms indicates that the Lab classrooms are out-performing the district averages on all assessment measures.

The Targeted Literacy Instruction (TLI) model was implemented in 2013 to address the needs of struggling readers in grades six through twelve. Teachers were selected based on their expertise with adolescent literacy, and having the knowledge and skills necessary to teach students strategies to develop as readers and writers. Students are identified based on performance on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. Specific strategy classes support the individual student’s particular needs. The Targeted Literacy Instructor co-teaches in core content classrooms to ensure students are generalizing the strategies taught. As with the lab teachers, the TLI model has proven highly successful. Teachers and students in general education classrooms began noticing the strategies used by targeted literacy students and asked the TLI to teach those same strategies to all students. Paired with our system-wide focus on literacy, the Lab and TLI structures are beginning to transform literacy practices in KCKPS.

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT-
Development and implementation of a college preparatory curriculum – vertically aligned from preschool through high school graduation – was critical. Pacing Guides were put in

place to guide instruction in every classroom and content area. Quarterly assessments have been deployed to monitor the pace and rigor of instruction throughout the system. Post assessment debriefings followed the Quarterly Assessments as a support strategy to ensure teachers, leaders, and support staff are engaged in reflective practice, grounded in the data, as plans for learning are developed. Today, the district is transitioning the quarterly assessment to “Common Assessments” based on rigorous units of study. The Common Assessments require a deep understanding of the standards and, most importantly, are creating meaningful dialogue and practice focused on essential learning and level of mastery required by our students.

The district’s strong belief and commitment that students can achieve high academic standards became the driver for voluntarily raising standards through a Department of Education “Waiver” in 2012. The waiver authorized the replacement of Kansas Assessments as the district accountability exam, with national college readiness assessments (ACT) for grades 8 and 11. Believing in the need for a clear alignment of standards and assessments, the district also administer the ACT ASPIRE in grades 9 and 10, along with the nationally normed “Measures of Academic Progress” assessment for grades 3 – 7. The waiver has since expired; however, these assessments continue to be the accountability measures that steer district continuous improvement.

EXPANSION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD – For more than a decade, preschool has been a focus of the KCKPS system. Historically, the district has served 400 - 500 children in the at-risk preschool program. Knowing that the community has approximately 3,600 three and four-year old children, the district is now aggressively looking for ways to increase the number of children served in early childhood programs. The district increased support to Parents as Teachers, serving nearly 600 children and families in 2015-16. It also expanded engagement with strong community partners, in order to provide quality early learning experiences to more children. Beginning in July 2014, the district was awarded the contract to serve as the lead Head Start agency in Wyandotte County. Currently the district serves just over 1,600 three and four year olds in preschool programs. Along with the efforts to increase the availability of early childhood programs, there is a simultaneous focus on ensuring that the programs are of high quality and prepare students to enter school Kindergarten-ready. Currently, 55% of district preschool children enter Kindergarten ready in the key areas of “approaches to learning, physical and health development, social emotional development, communication, literacy, and mathematical knowledge.”

BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL

The Education Trust (April 2016) released a report “Meandering Toward Graduation” which noted that while educators frequently speak to the need for students to exit high school college and career prepared, they rarely put comprehensive actions in place to ensure students have the foundational experiences and courses needed to be both college and career-ready. The data suggest that students are often meandering toward graduation. Rather than ensuring students have access to cohesive curriculum that aligns to high school coursework, and students’ future goals, high schools are prioritizing credit accrual,

which treats graduation as the end goal. These data call to attention the need to ensure that all students, particularly those from impoverished backgrounds, are fully prepared to take advantage of the range of opportunities that await them after high school.

Education Trust notes that school is not about preparing for more school. Rather, K-12 education is charged to ensure students have a solid academic foundation, anchored in strong literacy skills, with a wide variety of experiences in the Arts, in athletics, robotics, and leadership. At the same time, K-12 must help students identify their interests, passions, talents, and aptitudes, and support students to leverage who they are into pathways to professions of the future.

Georgetown University further drives home the compelling argument for a systemic approach that produces graduates equipped with skills and credentials beyond those typically associated with a high school diploma. A recent Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report found that by the year 2020, 65 percent of the jobs in the nation will require post secondary education. Further, the report found that the percentage in Kansas requiring some level of post secondary education will be 71 percent by the year 2020.

The National Network of Business and Industry Associations, a collaborative which represents major business sectors in manufacturing, retail, healthcare, energy, construction, hospitality, transportation and information technology sectors, identified the attainment of “business-defined skills” as those critically important common skills all employees should exhibit. Such skills can be broadly described as employability skills, in the area of “People, Personal, Applied Knowledge, and Workplace Skills.”

Finally, driving the point to the local level, KC Rising, a group of CEOs and business leaders from across the Kansas City Metropolitan Area, has worked to identify key strategies that will result in “Raising Our Shared Vision for Regional Prosperity.” The work of KC Rising identifies the high pay/high demand jobs in the region, not only looking at today, but also at future opportunities. KC Rising’s work sheds a light on the changing demands of the economy, and makes an indisputable argument for strong partnerships between the education and business communities. One specific recommendation includes a comprehensive approach, Talent Industry Exchange, to bring industry and education groups together to solve workforce challenges.

It is critical that the district consider these findings as it develops actions to position students to be prepared for their futures. For district students, more than 90% of whom live in poverty, more than 40% of whom are English-language learners, and many of whom will be first-generation college-going students, a high school diploma will not be enough to ensure success in college and careers. For several years now, district students have been encouraged to participate in early college programs. Participation has steadily grown over the last seven years, and gives confidence that the district can take the next step and graduate each student Diploma+.

INNOVATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT DESIGNATION LEADS TO DIPLOMA+

The district established an essential goal in 2010, that *“each student will exit high school prepared for college and careers in a global society, and at every level, performance is on-track and on-time for success.”* An opportunity arose in 2013, through state legislative action, that allowed school districts to apply for the membership in the Coalition of Innovative School Districts. The district saw this opportunity as a way to further examine what might be done to advance student success.

District leaders and Board of Education members came together to discuss what might be considered as part of an application to join this prestigious group of innovative educators. Early in the process, the district realized that being innovative meant defining and creating a plan to ensure each student was truly prepared for college and careers in a global society. The district could not be satisfied with graduating some (or even most) students prepared. The district did not want to create an exclusive situation that only focused on some of students. Rather, the focus became how to ensure “each” student graduated not only with a high school diploma, but with credentials and experiences that demonstrated preparation. Hence Diploma+ was born.

Today, the district and the community have come to realize that Diploma+, and all that it encompasses, has the potential to dramatically and positively impact the life trajectory of more than 22,000 students and their families, to impact the economic state of affairs of the KCK community, and to position students to make significant contributions to the world. Diploma+ is:

High School Diploma + X = Success

Examples of the X factors include:

- Completion of at least one full year of college (18-30 credit hours)
- Completion of a Technical or Industry recognized credential
- At least a 21 on the ACT or 1060 on the SAT, or
 - Acceptance into the Military (ASVAB)
 - Completion of a Qualified Internship
 - Earned International Baccalaureate Credit

For many reading this document, a response might be, *“I get the logic of Diploma+, but how exactly will the district achieve it?”*

It should be noted that the plan is to “evolve with a sense of urgency,” not to throw everything out and head in a new direction. The district will build on the quality of reform work already deployed, keeping the best of what has been learned, refining those areas that have shown promise, releasing what has not produced the desired results, and automating what must be done (due to regulation or policy) but is not contributing to the advancement of Diploma+.

The district learned from First Things first several critical features vital to student success.

1. Continuity of care across the school day, across the school years, in the form of Small Learning Communities (sometimes referred to as Academies, Houses, or Families)
2. High, clear and fair academic and behavioral standards that clearly define what students will know and be able to do (Guaranteed Viable Curriculum, Code of Conduct)
3. Collective responsibility for improvement in student performance

The district learned from District Leadership that Works (Marzano and Waters 2007) about the district leadership actions and responsibilities that make statistically significant, positive impacts on student achievement.

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting
2. Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction
3. Creating Board alignment with and support of district goals
4. Monitoring achievement and instructional goals
5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction

The district learned from research on systems change the importance of a process, or theory of action, used to aim the day-to-day actions of district leadership, school leadership, teachers and support staff. Initially, the district implemented the KCKPS 5-Step Process for Excellence. This has recently modified to the KCKPS Theory of Action.

Research previously cited indicates that success in a global society requires more than a high school diploma. Pulling all of the studies, experiences, and research together, the district is deploying the following three key actions to achieve the Essential Goal (Diploma+).

KEY ACTIONS TO ACHIEVING OUR ESSENTIAL GOAL (DIPLOMA+)

1. District Continuous Improvement Plan (DCIP)
 - a. Non-negotiable Instruction and Achievement Goals
 - b. Theory of Action
 - c. System-wide Implementation of the Model of Instruction
 - i. Explicit focus on literacy
 - d. Values and Expectations
2. College and Career Academies
 - a. Implementation
 - b. Upper Classman
 - c. Impact on Middle Schools
 - d. Global Courses of Study
 - e. Curriculum, Assessment, and Graduation Requirements

- f. Counselors and College and Career Coordinators
3. Partnership Investments
- a. Employer, Community, and Colleges and Universities
 - b. Advisory Boards

1. DISTRICT CONTINUOUS IMPROVMENT PLAN

Framed on the aforementioned District Leadership that Works, the DCIP outlines non-negotiable goals for district and school leaders, teachers, and support staff.

The DCIP also outlines non-negotiable goals for achievement leading to Diploma+ for each student (“what” the district intends to achieve).

a. **NON-NEGOTIABLE GOALS FOR DISTRICT/SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

- i. Results Driven Leadership
 - 1. Continuous Support for Improvement of Instruction
 - 2. Data-Driven Focus to Support Student Achievement

NON-NEGOTIABLE GOALS FOR INSTRUCTION

- i. Implement the Model of Instruction

NON-NEGOTIABLE GOALS FOR ACHIEVEMENT

- I. Enter Kindergarten Ready (On-track)
- II. Enter Middle School Ready (On-track and On-time)
- III. Enter High School on Track (On-track and On-time)
- IV. Graduate On-time Diploma+

- b. KCKPS THEORY OF ACTION Establishment of Leadership and Instructional Goals is only one step. It is important to implement a process to aim the day-to-day actions of district leadership, school leadership, teachers, and support staff towards those goals. The Theory of Action is “how” the district intends to achieve those goals.

- Step 1 –Establish Clear, Measurable Goal(s)
- Step 2 – Implement Actions
- Step 3 – Monitor and Adjust
- Step 4 – Analyze and Interpret Results

- c. MODEL OF INSTRUCTION - After several years of learning, KCKPS is fully implementing the Model of Instruction (as part of the KCKPS Growth Tool, adopted from the Learning Sciences Institute). Full implementation includes deepening the understanding of the Model through district, school-wide, and job

embedded professional learning; making connections with the Model and the established non-negotiable goals for instruction; monitoring and providing feedback through classroom walk thru protocols, and daily implementation of the Theory of Action, including informal and formal observations. District-wide data is reported to the Board of Education at least quarterly.

- I. Admittedly, the Model of Instruction is complex. The Model is a continuum, with scales to help teachers grow in their practice, generally starting with “Not Using”, moving to “Beginning”, progressing to “Developing”, “Applying”, and striving for “Innovating.”
 - II. The Model is not solely about what teachers must do. To the contrary, specific domains of practice are identified, with elements and scales, to support the day-to-day work of district and school leaders. The domains “cascade” from district leaders, to school leaders, to teacher actions, resulting in collective efficacy and responsibility for students’ success.
 - III. Included within the Model is the district focus on literacy. The district will continue to ensure a system-wide focus on reading, writing, speaking, and thinking across all content areas. Literacy emphasis must remain a primary focus from early childhood through graduation.
- d. Values and Expectations - Support staff are vitally important to district success. Recognizing that many of the most influential people in the lives of students include district employees who work outside of the classroom, the District Values and Expectations provide expectations that all staff must engage with students. The district values and expectations are designed to reinforce a positive culture of high expectations between staff and students, staff and families, staff and community/business partners, and within staff-to-staff interactions. Modeling, coaching, encouraging, re-focusing, and empowering students is the collective responsibility of all involved. Specially, district values and expectations remind staff to: "Be a Learner, Bring out the Best in People, Be Responsible, Do the Right Thing, and Achieve Results that Matter."

2. COLLEGE AND CAREER ACADEMIES

The district Model of Instruction focuses on the non-negotiable goals for instruction outlined in the DCIP. Just as critical as “how” teachers in the district teach are the structures in which learning is organized. Current structures for learning are Small Learning Communities (SLC) that organize teachers and students into smaller units. The

purpose of the SLC structure is to provide continuity of care and deepen relationships between a team of teachers and groups of students.

Today, most elementary school SLC models are organized in grade level teams. Middle School SLCs are often organized by grade level, and in teams within each grade level. High School SLCs are organized by grade levels or across grade levels (9-12) with career themes.

College and Career Academies are small, supportive learning environments, similar to the structures of our SLC. The academies have a career focus, linked to pathways into college or to completion of industry-recognized credentials in skilled trades. The major difference between the SLC structure and College and Career Academies is that in the latter, all content is taught through the career focus, rather than students having just a few select theme classes.

- a. IMPLEMENTATION – During the spring and summer of 2016, select KCKPS staff worked alongside business leaders, parents, and students to identify the College and Career Academies that KCKPS will offer, paying close attention to the alignment of selected Academies to the high pay/high demand jobs in the Kansas City Metropolitan area. The Academies recommended are listed below.

During the 2016-17 school year, all five high schools will organize into College and Career Academies.

KCKPS COLLEGE AND CAREER ACADEMIES

- + Health Sciences
- + Advanced Manufacturing, Transportation and Logistics
- + Engineering, Architecture, and Construction
- + Information Technology
- + Business and Finance
- + Human and Public Services
- + International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) or International Baccalaureate Career-Related Programme (IBCP)

Pathways for specific career fields will be identified early in the 2016-17 school year, with the plan to deploy the Academies with specific career pathways during the 2017-18 school year.

EXAMPLES OF ACADEMY AND PATHWAY RELATIONSHIP

Student A is interested in Health Sciences, with a particular interest in nursing. Student A enrolls in the Health Science Academy, with his primary area of study (Pathway) in the pre-nursing program.

Student B is interested in becoming a diesel mechanic. Student B enrolls in Advanced Manufacturing, Transportation, and Logistics, with her primary area of study (Pathway) automotive mechanic.

All of Student A and Student B's course work would be taught through the Academy focus, with the exception of courses referred to as "Global Courses of Study" (see Global Studies section below).

Each Academy will be designed to meet the ten key elements for successful, sustained, and implemented academies outlined by the [National Standards of Practice](#) (NSOP) for College and Career Academies. The district is working in collaboration with the National Career Academy Coalition to ensure that NSOP are met.

- b. Upper classman - As the College and Career Academies are developed, KCKPS upper classman (Juniors and Seniors) will continue to be encouraged to participate in early college and/or technical college courses while in high school. The district believes this work is extremely valuable in assisting students to move their dreams to goals, with clearly identified pathways to reach their goals. During the 2015-16 school year, hundreds of KCKPS students participated in early college and technical college courses. The district has an increasing number of students already graduating Diploma+, with 45% of seniors completing college hours, and 62% earning an industry recognized credential.
- c. Impact on Middle School - The College and Career Academy focus elevates the work that middle schools put into place in the 2014-15 school year. Middle schools began facilitating student participation in college and industry visits, exploration of careers through activities such as career jumping, and career cruising, and are working to support their students to expand their vision of potential careers.

Robust career exploration activities in the middle school years support students to identify their talents, passions, and interests. The unique student interest and talents are captured in an Individual Plan of Study (Dashboard). This student-focused approach assists the incoming high school student to identify a College and Career Academy that aligns with their post-secondary aspirations. It also places students on the pathway to graduate with meaningful experiences and credentials in their chosen career field (Diploma+).

- d. Global Courses of Study are cross-curricular areas that may or may not be tied directly to an Academy, but are vital to the development of well-rounded citizens. The Global Courses of Study include Fine Arts, Music, Physical Education, and Foreign Languages. In addition to the Academy experiences, KCKPS students will continue to participate in courses identified as “global” as part of their preparation to compete in a global society.
- e. Curriculum, Assessment and Graduation Requirements are important components of a quality educational experience. The Curriculum articulates what the district wants students to know and be able to do (standards), and provides educators the resources and pacing guides to frame their instructional decisions. Assessments are used for a variety of purposes, the most productive of which is to inform next steps in teaching and learning. Graduation requirements are like the GPS of schools, providing all stakeholders a roadmap of the requirements to be promoted, earn a diploma, or degree. Diploma+ and the College and Career Academy structure affords the district the opportunity to re-examine curriculum, assessments and graduation requirements.

In past curriculum revisions, the district used as guideposts the standards tested on high-stakes assessments like the NWEA MAP and ACT. Those tools will continue to have relevance. However, as the district re-examines the curriculum curriculum, more opportunities will be included that promote student learning consistent with the findings outlined in Wagner and Dintersmith’s Most Likely to Succeed. While these skills and attributes are mentioned as part of the College and Career Academies, this is not intended to suggest that EC-8 should not nurture and develop these important skills. In fact, these skills can and should be reflected in the curriculum, and taught explicitly at all grade levels. In addition, these skills can be linked directly to the Model of Instruction (Domains 2,3,4), and are recommended by the National Network of Business and Industry Associations as essential “People, Personal, Applied, and Work Skills” for the future workforce.

Students

- attack meaningful, engaging challenges
- have access to real world and authentic resources
- struggle and learn how to recover from failure
- form their own points of view
- engage in frequent debate
- learn to ask good questions
- collaborate
- display accomplishments publicly
- work hard because they are intrinsically motivated.

Providing student experiences that move content knowledge to application, or real-world experiences, is a priority. Project-based, experiential learning will help the district evolve instruction from teacher-lead, to student-centered. In educator jargon, this approach might be described as facilitating students' engagement in cognitively complex tasks. Using more commonly understood language, this approach to teaching is designed to "make it (content) real and relevant" to students.

The district's student-centered curriculum will lead to healthy conversations about the most important assessment tools. High stakes assessments continue to be part of district reality, and some, like the ACT, SAT and the military entrance exam (ASVAB) open doors for students. State-directed assessments continue to be required. While the state assessment, in its current form, shows promise, the verdict is out on how useful these assessments will be for future student success. Regardless, the district must place each in its proper place, and consider what the assessments say about students' readiness for their next steps.

Graduation requirements are also important as the district has implement Diploma+. The question the district must be willing to ask is: "*Do graduation requirements reflect what students need to know and be able to do for the professions of the future?*" District staff must also be willing to ask: "*What will it take to move from a system focused on credit accrual, to a system focused on coursework tied to student's future goals?*" The district will examine requirements, consider these questions, and more, to determine what changes and adjustments are warranted.

- f. Counselors and College and Career Coordinators play a somewhat unique role in bridging the gap between classroom experiences and student understanding of the pathways to specific careers. Working in collaboration with administrators, teachers, and support staff, counselors and college and career coordinators serve as the lighthouse watchpersons to ensure students are on-track for Diploma+.

Specifically, counselors at all levels are crucial to implementing a systemic approach to supporting pro-social skills (people and personal Skills mentioned in a pervious section), social-emotional development, and to facilitate opportunities for leadership development. These experiences are both foundational to youth development, and in many cases serve as a lifeline for students.

Counselors also stand at the pivot point of supporting students to identify goals, develop the acumen (or self-confidence) to pursue their goals, and to show students the pathway(s) to actually achieve their goals. Student understanding of the pathway that will turn their goals into reality is

frequently the missing link. Counselors, working hand in hand with students, families, teachers, administrators, College and Career Coordinators (middle and high school), and support staff, will be engaged in the following activities:

- support the development of student lead conferences (elementary);
- individual plans of study aligned to career goals (middle and high school);
- ensure students are enrolled in classes following the articulated sequence of course requirements for a given grade level and College and Career Academy;
- promote family engagement and involvement, which is vital to the entire process.

Counselors are expected to take a lead roll in supporting and facilitating family engagement, and to leverage the Family Advocacy system in place throughout the district, as a resource to inform and engage families.

College and Career Coordinators (CCCs) also serve as a pivot point to support the development of Individual Plans of Study (middle and high schools), facilitate college and industry visits; and work in collaboration with business, industry and higher education partners. CCCs guide and facilitate student participation in career jumping, job shadowing, and internship experiences. CCCs work in collaboration with counselors to support students to identify career interests using tools such as Spark-Career Cruising, and Career Cruising. Vital to the work of CCCs is to communicate and connect students with opportunities to complete requirements for early college admission, and to avenues for completion of industry credentials.

3. PARTNERSHIP INVESTMENTS

Diploma+ does not happen in isolation from strong partnerships with higher education, business and industry, and certainly without strong partnerships with families.

- a. Partnerships with employers, the community, and local colleges and universities are essential to bring resources from outside the school, and to provide experiential learning. The district needs partners to invest time, talent, knowledge, and resources that support Academies and Diploma+ in total.
- b. Advisory Boards are a critical component of College and Career Academies. One of the major roles of district partners is to serve on Academy Advisory Boards. Members review curriculum, industry certifications, and communicate specific information to ensure Academies are keeping pace with industry trends and standards. Members play a key

role to identify experiential components for students, such as mentoring, job shadowing, industry visits, internships. Members may also co-teach within the Academy.

FINANCING DIPLOMA+

Education is the most important investment we make in our students and therefore our future. Diploma+ is the systemic work of KCKPS. Our investments in staff and resources are all designed to achieve our Essential Goal. We utilize all of our financial resources to make Diploma+ happen. However, there are costs associated with Diploma+ that are outside of the district's operating budget. These cost primarily encompass tuition for college and technical college courses.

Non-public school funding sources are leveraged to pay the tuition costs for our students. The funding sources include private donations, contributions from business partners, and contributions made possible through development agreements through our Unified Government. We are actively working on a Memorandum of Understanding with various colleges and universities to reduce, if not waive, the cost of tuition for our students. In the meantime, we will continue to seek funding sources to ensure funding does not become a barrier for our student to graduate Diploma+.

EVALUATION

Program evaluation is important to determine the actual impact of our efforts to reach our Essential Goal. Quarterly reports of progress are reviewed with the KCKPS Board of Education, and made public through the district web-site. Admittedly, we are making progress, but not at the rate for which we are satisfied. Revisions to the DCIP are made annually, following feedback and input from a variety of stakeholder groups (including staff, parent, and community survey data). We anticipate the changes in our current Plan will support accelerated progress.

In addition, we expect implementation of the Academies to follow the same positive trajectory in KCKPS as has been evidenced by other school districts. Academies have been reported to increase student engagement, improve, increase attendance, increase on-time graduation rates, increase academic performance, and enhance future job and earnings prospects. We will closely monitor the aforementioned areas and include our data in the quarterly and annual reports of progress.

CONCLUSION

Diploma+ spells out exactly what it means for students to be “prepared for college and careers in a global society.” The District Continuous Improvement Plan provides specific direction to reach Diploma+. As the district and community implements this work and reaches its Essential Goal, all students will have access to high skill, high wage, high demand careers, and the opportunity to reach their dreams.