



**DIPLOMA+:**  
**Preparing Students for the Professions of the Future**

White Paper - Executive Summary  
July, 2017





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#### 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

The journey towards Diploma+ can be traced back to 1996, when the district took the courageous step of laying out student performance data for all to see. Only 11% of students were proficient in reading and 3% were proficient in math at that time. Over the next 15 years, using the principles of the First Things First reform effort, that percentage increased to almost 70% meeting the standard for reading and math in 2011. Since that time, as the Kansas assessment system has changed, the district has moved to tracking students' preparedness for college and careers, and the short-term trend data is encouraging.

The current work is built on research by Robert Marzano Ph.D., and Timothy Waters Ph.D., in "District Leadership That Works" (2007), as well as a series of listening tours held throughout Kansas City, Kansas, providing an opportunity to listen to parents, students, business/community members, and teachers. The message heard, "pleased but not satisfied," has helped shape both urgency and the drive toward excellence.

#### SYSTEMIC REFORM

Tackling disparities created by socio-economic and language barrier gaps requires systemic reform. Marshaling school, district, community and business resources, and thinking outside of the box, will allow true innovation to reach its vision of ***"Striving to become 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 Board of Education approved the first District Continuous Improvement Plan (DCIP) in 2010 and continues to align fiscal and human resources to support its implementation in the following featured areas:

Highly Literate Citizens - The district created classroom libraries and intensive professional learning at all grade levels for literacy-rich environments.

College and Career Readiness Curriculum and Assessments - A college preparatory curriculum – vertically aligned from preschool through high school graduation – was critical. Currently, the district is transitioning to "Common Assessments" based on rigorous units of study.

Expansion Of Early Childhood – Preschool has expanded from 400 to just over 1,600 children while ensuring that high quality programs are preparing students for kindergarten.

## WHAT DIPLOMA+ MEANS

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 necessary to be both college and career-ready. The data suggest that students too often find themselves meandering toward graduation, rather than moving with purpose and intention.

The needs of the job market require that students continue to pursue formal education after high school in order to obtain the skills and credentials necessary to access jobs with middle-class wages. All students will need to be prepared for post-secondary education. The district responded to an opportunity that arose in 2013 that allowed school districts to apply for membership in the Coalition of Innovative School Districts. It has allowed the district to pursue policies and practices that more closely align with the needs of its students. The focus quickly became how to ensure *each* student graduated, not only with a high school diploma, but also with credentials and experiences that demonstrated preparation. It was from this focus that Diploma+ was born.

Diploma+ means that district students will need more than a high school diploma to reach their dreams. We have identified the following endorsements that, when paired with a high school diploma, place our students on the path to success:

- Completion of at least one full year of college (18 – 30 credit hours)
- Completion of an Industry Recognized Credential or Certificate
- At least a 21 on the ACT or 1060 on the SAT
- Acceptance into the Military (ASVAB)
- Completion of a qualified Internship or Industry approved project
- Approved plan for post-secondary transition
- Completion of International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme or International Baccalaureate Career-Related Programme

## KEYS TO ACHIEVING DIPLOMA+

The district will focus its work from 2016 to 2021 on the following:

### 1. DISTRICT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN (DCIP)

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 KCKPS Theory of Action; a Model of Instruction; and [KCKPS Values and Expectations](#).

### 2. COLLEGE AND CAREER ACADEMIES

Small Learning Communities (SLCs) organize teachers and students into smaller units that deepen relationships among teachers and groups of students. In order to meet the needs of Diploma+ at the high school level, the district is transitioning from SLCs to College and Career Academies, which have similar small, supportive learning environments. The academies have a career focus, linked to pathways into college, or to completion of industry-recognized credentials and certificates. The transition begins for the class of 2021, who are entering ninth grade in the 2017-18 school year.

KCKPS staff, working alongside business leaders, parents and students, identified the following 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 have been identified in the 2016-17 school year, with the plan to deploy the academies with specific career pathways during the 2018-19 school year. Students entering 9th Grade in 2017-18 will be organized into 9th Grade Academies, which will provide in-depth exploration of the College and Career Academy industry themes. As these same students transition into their sophomore year, they select their industry area of concentration and the endorsement they will pursue for graduation.

### **3. PARTNERSHIP INVESTMENTS**

It is critical to have strong partnerships with employers, higher education and families. Employers and community members bring resources and experiential learning. Partners serve on our steering committee and advisory boards to review curriculum and industry certifications as well as providing mentoring, job shadowing, industry visits and internships. Colleges and universities offer students college credits while in high school. This is especially important for students who may not see themselves as "college material" until they take these courses in a supportive environment. It also reduces the cost of college. Families provide encouragement and support at home.

### **FINANCING DIPLOMA+**

The district will invest all available resources to make Diploma+ happen and achieve the Essential Goal. The primary cost outside of the district's operating budget includes tuition for college and technical college courses. Sources include private donations, contributions from business partners and agreements with the Unified Government of Wyandotte County. The district is working on a Memorandum of Understanding with various colleges and universities to reduce or waive the cost of tuition.

### **EVALUATION**

[Quarterly reports](#) are reviewed with the KCKPS Board of Education, with the Diploma+ Steering Committee, and made public through the district website. The district is making progress, but not at a satisfactory rate. Revisions to the DCIP are made annually following feedback from stakeholder groups, including staff, parent and community survey results. Changes in the plan will support accelerated progress.

In addition, the district expects the academies to follow the same positive trajectory as other model school districts, where academies have increased student engagement, attendance, on-time graduation, academic performance and future job prospects. The district will include this data in quarterly and annual reports.

## **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.