

# Council Designations: Pathway Endorsement Criteria

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## Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the intent of the Pathway Endorsement Council Designation, identify the discipline areas in which Pathway Endorsements can be earned, and provide information on the criteria students will meet to be eligible to earn a Pathway Endorsement.

The guidance provided in this document is one piece of a larger, ongoing effort by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to provide schools and districts with support and technical assistance toward meeting the goals of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education-adopted Secondary School Regulations. This is not an exhaustive or all-purpose document. RIDE will provide additional information in separate documents or alternative formats, including frameworks for structures and processes necessary to ensure full implementation of the Pathway Endorsement Council Designation.

## Overview and Intent of Pathway Endorsements

Rhode Island policy calls for students to have a variety of options to complete their coursework and diploma assessment requirements in ways that best support the students' learning. Specifically, to improve student engagement and increase the relevance of academic content, students may choose to pursue a number of courses and learning experiences that align to a particular area of interest to the student and build on each other. This is known as a pathway. Pathways provide students the opportunity to self-direct a customized learning experience, capitalizing on school and community opportunities toward personal interest, post-secondary education and careers. The purpose of the Pathway Endorsement is to certify that a student has accomplished deep learning in a chosen area of interest by actively pursuing experiences in a pathway that combines academic study, work-based learning, and application of skills. A Pathway Endorsement recognizes that a student has actively chosen a series of learning experiences in a pathway and persisted in engaging with and mastering the content.

Pathway Endorsements add value to the diploma system by:

- Signaling to employers, colleges, universities, training programs, and the military that a student has completed a comprehensive, in-depth, and applied course of study in a specialized area;
- Cultivating transferable work habits including self-reflection, self-direction, and perseverance through purposeful and meaningful planning of learning experiences;
- Promoting engagement, effectiveness, and growth by allowing for choice in how, when, and in what ways students learn and demonstrate learning; and
- Supporting learning opportunities that are diverse, rigorous, and connected to the world outside of the school building.

## *Earning a Pathway Endorsement through Cohort-based Programs and Individualized Pathways*

Pathway Endorsements recognize, or endorse, engagement and deep learning in a discipline. Students may earn a Pathway Endorsement through participation in a cohort-based pathway program or an individualized pathway.

Cohort-based pathway programs are comprised of a series of experiences and/or courses that are intended to prepare students for careers or further study in specific career fields. The cohort-based pathway

experience is typically designed by the school and students undergo this series of experiences with a cohort of similarly-interested peers. Students who successfully complete pathway programs (e.g. CTE or academy programs) will likely earn a Pathway Endorsement upon completion, if the program structure is designed to fulfill the Pathway Endorsement criteria. Some cohort-based pathway programs may have requirements that exceed the criteria set forth in this document to earn a Pathway Endorsement.

Students may also earn a Pathway Endorsement by satisfying endorsement criteria through an individualized pathway that is not associated with a specific cohort-based pathway program. LEAs and schools will need to designate a process for students to be able to design a thoughtful, rigorous pathway that meet the required criteria that lead to a Pathway Endorsement. These experiences may be comprised of learning opportunities within the school, in the community, or through state-wide course access (such as the Advanced Coursework Network or Dual- and Concurrent-Enrollment opportunities, Project SEARCH, etc.).

## Pathway Endorsement Areas

Beginning with the class of 2021, students may earn a Pathway Endorsement in one or more of the following:

- (1) The Arts
- (2) Business and Industry
- (3) Humanities and World Languages
- (4) Public Service
- (5) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)
- (6) Teaching

This comprehensive set of endorsement areas reflects the current course cluster and pathway work that is already underway in Rhode Island secondary schools and/ or are reflective with RIDE's priorities (i.e. the Teaching Pathway Endorsement). A study of existing cohort-based programs in Rhode Island schools provided the information about current course cluster and pathway work. The chosen endorsement areas allow for existing cohort-based programs in Rhode Island to be structured in such a way as to lead to a Pathway Endorsement in one of the six Pathway Endorsement areas.

## The Three Components of a Pathway Endorsement

Students are eligible to earn a Pathway Endorsement if they have successfully completed three components: (1) academic study, (2) work-based learning, and (3) application of skills through the Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGRs). The criteria to fulfill each of the three components are outlined in the following paragraphs.

### *Component One: Academic Study*

Students must successfully complete three (3) independent, connected courses, characterized by:

- Increased complexity, and complementary or cumulative content
- Deep learning with increased level of specialization that builds coherence of the topic through coursework

- One or more courses must be advanced or experiential (Note: LEAs evaluate/ validate a learning experience as advanced or experiential within this framework; representative examples include, but are not limited to: Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, career and technical education program courses resulting in an industry-recognized credential, work-based learning courses, lab-based science courses, and expanded learning opportunities):
  - Advanced Course: builds on foundational knowledge beyond the content standards or learning in areas of specialization; deep study of a particular area; or includes enough breadth to adequately cover the topic and sufficient depth to be considered deep learning in the subject matter.
  - Experiential Course: builds on knowledge outside of the core course sequence and beyond the content standards; content knowledge is acquired through direct experiences outside a traditional academic setting; and incorporates feedback, reflection, and the application of skill. Course content includes enough breadth to adequately cover the topic and sufficient depth to be considered deep learning in the subject matter.
- Two of three courses should be outside of the typical courses for a particular content area or area of study suggested for all students. For example, if the mathematics courses for most students is Algebra 1, Geometry, and then Algebra II, only one of the aforementioned courses could be applied towards Academic Study.
- Two of the three courses should be actively chosen by students to be included in their high school course of study
- Courses can simultaneously satisfy core-content course requirements, as applicable, (e.g. 4 math, 4 ELA, 3 science, 3 social studies) and overall minimum course requirements (e.g. 20 minimum courses) for graduation purposes as well as Pathway Endorsement requirements, as defined by the Secondary School Regulations.
- Successful completion of coursework is contingent on demonstration of high school content standards aligned with the course.

### *Component Two: Work-Based Learning*

Work-based Learning experiences should provide students with real world context for engaging with their chosen content and topic of interest. Work-based learning is a critical component of a student’s pathway and encompasses activities that provide students with real-life or simulated work experiences. Work-based learning can occur through a variety of different experiences, including internships, apprenticeships, service learning projects, school-based enterprise and industry projects. The experience should go beyond job shadowing and the career exploration that occurs as part of the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) process.

Students must successfully complete a work-based learning experience, characterized by:

- Acquisition of knowledge and skills related to the pathway;
- Meaningful contact with and opportunities to work alongside professional practitioners in the field; and
- Responsibilities, impact, and/or opportunities to practice in the area of interest or career field that deepens learning of the content area.

This work-based learning experience should provide students with real-world experiences where they can apply and develop their academic, technical, and professional skills. The work-based learning experience should be documented in the form of a resume in which a student can use in their post-secondary transition to college, a career, or training program.

See the Governor’s Workforce Board Work-based Learning Guidance for more information on work-based learning activities, standards and guidance: [www.prepare-ri.org/wbl](http://www.prepare-ri.org/wbl).

### ***Component Three: Application of Skills through Performance-Based Diploma Assessment***

Students must successfully complete a performance-based diploma assessment by aligning their demonstration of knowledge to the topic that they studied. Students must apply and demonstrate the knowledge and skills gained through their pathway coursework and chosen work-based learning experience and reflect on the pathway experience.

Students are already expected to complete a performance-based diploma assessment (portfolio senior project/ exhibition, capstone product, etc.) as part of the high school graduation requirements. The performance-based diploma assessment is a multifaceted assignment that serves as a culminating demonstration of a student’s applied learning skills and knowledge or one or more content areas. Tying the performance-based graduation assessment to the Pathway Endorsement area of study links already existing graduation requirements to an evaluation of deep learning and validates personalization. In most cases, it is expected that this pathway-aligned diploma assessment will fulfill the state minimum graduation requirement of one performance-based diploma assessment (starting with the class of 2021).

## **Pathway Endorsement Council Designation: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. When does a student need to decide to pursue a Pathway Endorsement? How would a student “declare” that they are pursuing an endorsement?**

The Pathway Endorsement is intended to be both a flexible and intentional part of a student’s high school experience. The process must allow students to build upon strengths, positive past experiences, and emerging interests to cultivate deep learning experiences in a thoughtful way.

- Pathway Endorsement fulfillment cannot be wholly retroactive. Pathway Endorsements cannot be awarded through transcript review or similar methods.
- Students may apply previously completed requirements to a Pathway Endorsement once they choose to pursue the Pathway Endorsement (i.e. students complete 1 out of 3 courses and a work-based learning experience prior to choosing to pursue a Pathway Endorsement). However, a substantial amount of requirements should be completed *after* a student makes a declaration to pursue a Pathway Endorsement.
- There is no formal decision or “declaration” process for a student, school, or LEA to complete for RIDE. Instead, schools should design a process, documented in the Individual Learning Plan, and communicated in the student handbook, that is appropriate for their school context in which students declare intent to pursue a Pathway Endorsement.
- This process should always be discussed with appropriate guidance or advising by informed adults and with active involvement of the student’s parent/guardian.

**2. Are Pathway Endorsements available to all students?**

Appropriate supports and accommodations should be provided to all students (including students with disabilities, English Learners, students performing below grade level, and students with other needs) in meeting the criteria to earn a Pathway Endorsement. Students who qualify for alternate assessment are eligible for a Pathway Endorsement and should be able to access pathway criteria by satisfying alternate achievement standards in their academic study, career development planning, work-based learning, and other learning experiences.

**3. Are experiences mutually exclusive to meeting one criteria? What if a student completes an experience that satisfies multiple endorsement criteria?**

If one experience or course meets multiple criteria, it can fulfill up to two requirements, in consideration of flexibility, transferability, and increased access to Pathway Endorsements. An example might be a student who completes an internship with a rich enough experience that would count as both one of the three credited courses and the work-based learning criteria.

**4. Who decides if a student earns a Pathway Endorsement?**

All Pathway Endorsement criteria will be confirmed at the local level, as occurs with all other diploma requirements. An LEA may confer a Pathway Endorsement to a student if the LEA has determined that the student has met all Pathway Endorsement criteria. A variety of learning experiences should be considered to fulfill coursework requirements, as defined by the Secondary School Regulations.

RIDE's role is to provide criteria and guidelines, which are set forth, in part, within this document. It is an LEA decision to determine which courses qualify and the level of performance students must demonstrate to successfully complete coursework, work-based learning experiences, and performance-based diploma assessments requirements.