MASTERY TRANSCRIPT CONSORTIUM™

PATHWAYS HIGH SCHOOL:
Designed for Success

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Pathways High School was established because the co-founders saw a problem and responded: the traditional education model was wasting talent. Julia Burns, co-founder and board president, explained, "Each of my five children is different and each have amazing gifts. But the one-size-fits-all system squelches their creativity and their potential. Everywhere I look in our schools, talent is squandered. We can't afford to let talent go to waste. We are far too needy in this world. The problems we face are far too big. We need every drop of talent there is."

There is a huge difference between getting everyone to graduation standards, whatever state policy determines that to be, and developing talent. Traditional schools aim at preparing students for graduation by completing a certain number of courses. Some schools, both traditional and modern, aim for college and career readiness. And there are some schools, such as Pathways High, that have set their goals to help students discover and develop their talent. They are designing for success.

But what does it mean to design for success?

Believe that Students Want to be Successful
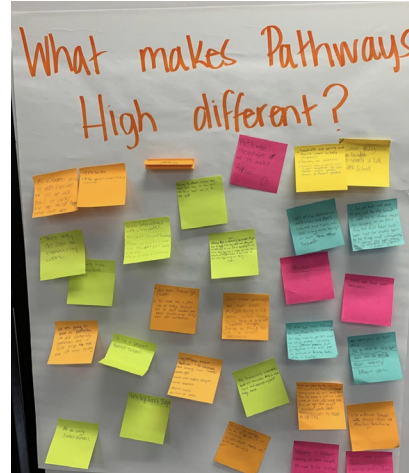
Most schools would say that they want all their students to be successful and point to their mission statement as evidence. The problem is that in the traditional system, we rank students. Students experience a system that is telling them they are a winner, a loser, or somewhere in between.

At Pathways High they start by trusting that each and every one of their students wants to be successful. Day in and day out, no matter what behavior students are demonstrating, the Pathways High team assumes that all their students want to be successful in their lives. They assume that everyone wants to be a winner. Who wouldn't want to be successful? Even those who might be coming to school late. Even those who aren't turning in their assignments on time. Even those who are slumped in the back of the room with their eyes down. By trusting that their students want to be successful, regardless of their behavior, the team at Pathways High flips the traditional school model on its head. This is a big step beyond the rhetoric of 'all kids can learn.' Pathways believes that once students find the vision for their future that will inspire them they will all find themselves on a path to success

Kim Taylor, Director of Pathways High, described the importance of students learning to have an impact in their lives. "Learning is a process," she said. "We want to help our students develop emotionally and academically. But it can't be a process if I'm going to tell you how to behave. Compliance models are never going to work with kids with high needs and behaviors that get in the way

of learning. You can't force them to comply and then say learning is a process. They won't believe you and they won't trust you. It simply doesn't work."

Taylor explained, "Our society operates on an efficiency model. And we expect instant gratification. We expect that just because we tell a student something, they should do it. We expect them to change their behavior just because we told them to." She continued, "An alternative approach is to believe that students want to be successful and that it may take time to help them reach their goals. It's a model that is based on the use of effective strategies that may take longer than asking students to comply. It may even take a year or two for behavior to fully change. The difference is that the students become responsible for their behavior and their ability to navigate the environment. They aren't waiting for someone to tell them what to do."

Most schools will define what student success is through their graduate profiles. However, Pathways High believes that students will be motivated by their own ideas of success. "Success is going to be defined by each student," Taylor said. "It's not just about getting a high GPA or how much money you earn. The

next generation is pushing back on the idea that income means happiness. They have a different sense of purpose and ideas about what will bring them happiness. We want our students to create their own understanding of success. We are going to work with them so they have the critical skills to create the lives they want and to navigate whatever challenges they encounter."

Believing that every student is going to be successful doesn't mean they are going to be exactly the same. Angelique Byrne, curriculum director and IMPACT coordinator, added, "There is always going to be a spectrum in people's abilities. Even as adults, each one of us brings different assets to the team and that's a good thing. We don't expect all students to get an "A+" or the equivilant in every area, and if they are, it is probably because they know how to play the grading game. Often schools still give points as extra credit to bring up a grade. Often, they are getting points for behavior." One of Pathways High's core values is "Excellence through Purpose," and they are designing their school so that every student has a chance to shine in ways that interest them and are important to them. Not by getting a 4.0 GPA, but by demonstrating what they can do.

Replacing Ranking with Everyone Succeeds

"I'm not sure why anyone would have a problem with everyone being successful?" asked Byrne. "Why is it so hard to imagine a world where every high school student is successful?"

It's true. It's difficult to even imagine every student excited for their future, with a toolbox of knowledge and skills in hand and the connections they need to pursue their interests through a mix of college and careers. The concept of ranking is so firmly set in our culture and mindsets that it's difficult to keep a picture of "success for everyone" in our minds long enough to design around it. In the culture of ranking that dominates the traditional system, we always assume that there are some students who will do well and some who won't. Even without a formal bell curve to force a distribution, this idea that there is a group of students who will never do well persists. We let them pass onto the next grade each year. We give them a diploma for completing courses even if they didn't learn very much. We either didn't believe they wanted to be successful or schools didn't believe that they could or should help them learn. Or both.

Believing that students want to be successful is a step beyond the chant of the last two decades that "every student can learn." It's not just that they can learn; they want to learn. The final step is believing that schools can help every student learn and help every student be successful. It's a belief that the school and staff can be designed so that students can develop intrinsic motivation and the skills to create a successful, fulfilling life.

A Pedagogy for Success

Of the five schools I visited and interviewed this fall on behalf of the Mastery Transcript Consortium, it was fascinating to see the similarities between Pathways High School, a charter in downtown Milwaukee, and Tilton School, a residential, independent school an hour north of Manchester, New Hampshire.

Pathways High, just three years old and diverse by design, is drawing from suburban schools, private Waldorf, and Montessori schools as well as from diverse communities in Milwaukee. Many students are facing the challenges of struggling with the impact of poverty on their lives. The school is in a tiny facility. The library is made up of two bookshelves. At Tilton, established in 1845, families have enough wealth to send their children to a private school (although it should be noted that Tilton is generous with scholarships). The campus spreads over 146 acres with multiple sports facilities.

Yet, they both value low student:teacher ratios and school designs that allow for strong relationships. They both have cultures of trust (although there is something magical about schools that can create trust that stretches across racial and economic diversity). And they both value students developing interests, passions, and the opportunity to create their own understanding of success.

The similarity isn't a coincidence. Pathways High is designed to provide the same high quality education that students in independent schools receive. Taylor emphasized, "Everyone needs an education where they learn to be great problem-solvers and discover a path to success."

Balancing General and Special Knowledge and Skills

One of the undercurrents in the field of personalized learning is how to balance common expectations for what we want for every student and supporting students in cutting their own path based on what is meaningful for them. Sometimes, this gets positioned as a tension between equity and personalization, but it doesn't have to be. Taylor explained, "Students are going to pick their path. There is no reason to believe they are going to know what they want to do in high school. We think of students as generalists who are developing a deeper understanding of how to look at the world through different perspectives. At the same time, they are developing skills. Some will be drawn to certain things and develop high levels of skills. What we want to do at Pathways High is balance helping students be generalists while also developing more specialized skills. The

Making it Real at Pathways High

The staff at Pathways High talk about kids, not theory. However, as I listened and observed them throughout the day, several theoretical principles were clearly shaping the school. I highlight them here to show how the learning model is developing (I say developing rather than developed, as Pathways High is in a constant process of iteration) and how the components work together as a whole.

## #1 Motivation Theory of Self-Determination

Pathways wants to create opportunities for students to explore and pursue topics that interest them. It's not because they believe interest itself will motivate students. It's to create a sense of purpose and create some degree of autonomy. These are two of the ingredients found in the motivational theory of self-determination, the third being mastery. When students have some control over their environment, they will be more motivated. Purpose is what is needed to develop intrinsic motivation. When students are motivated, they aren't just doing their schoolwork because they have to. They own their learning and are striving for excellence because they care.

#2 Adolescent Development and the Formation of Identity

Interests also help students develop a positive sense of identity. Pathways is highly tuned to the process of adolescent development and the formation of identity.

→ **Future Focus:** Pathways High helps students make the transition from the
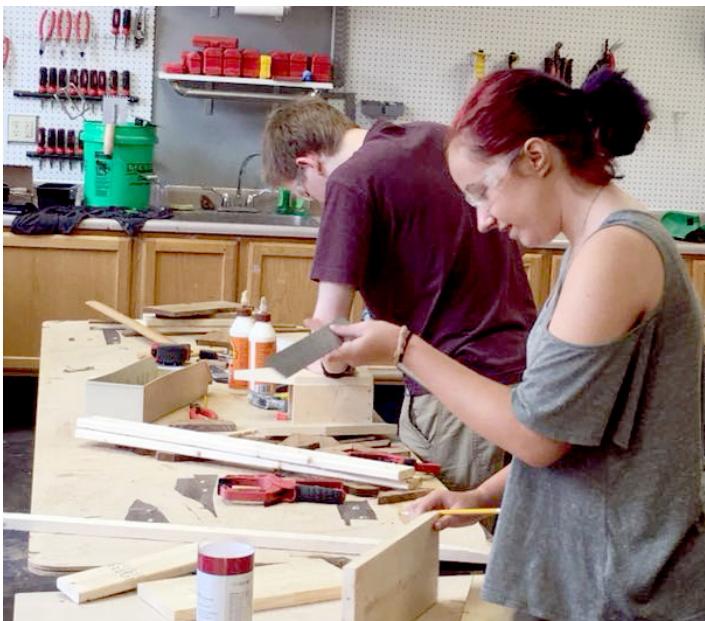
questions typical to early adolescence such as Who am I? to the questions of young adulthood, *Who do I want to be?, What do I want my future life to be?,* and *What do I need to do to get there?*

→ **Belonging**: They know students want to find a community where they belong. It's an important step for teens as they begin to separate from their family of origin and build bonds with others in the broader community. Being accepted by peers is important. Pathways uses multiple strategies to create community and a sense of family.

→ **Voice**: Students are developing their own voice. Schools use the term "voice" in multiple ways. It can mean expressing one's views and feelings. It can refer to taking leadership roles. At Pathways High it has the specific meaning of learning to use one's voice in self-advocacy. They want students to be able to navigate new environments (one of the many youth development outcomes). They want students to be able to advocate for themselves in new and challenging situations. (See Agents of Their Own Success: Self-Advocacy Skills and Self-Determination for Students with Disabilities in the Era of Personalized Learning from National Center for Learning Disabilities for an introduction to the idea of self-advocacy.)

#3 Research on Learning

The learning experiences at Pathways High emphasize projects and impact experiences. They want students to be active learners, knowing they will learn best when they are engaged and intrinsically motivated. Teachers take into consideration prior knowledge as they develop relevance through a combination of high interest options and helping students make connections between the standards and the real world. The transparency of standards and the pursuit of mastery means that

students are expected to revise and practice until they reach proficiency. They learn to use the knowledge and skills, not just memorize. These are all core instructional practices that are rooted in the research on learning and motivation.

Putting it All Together: The Pathways High Learning Model

The core components are *impact experiences, seminars, cohorts,* and *empower hou*r. Pathways is also working with the Mastery Transcript Consortium to pilot the Mastery Transcript, which has the potential to become another core component.

Impact Experiences

"The real world defines rigor" at Pathways High. Students make connections to the real world through impact experiences. The hope is that each interaction with the world beyond the classroom will have an impact on the lives of students. They learn about the world around them. They see the relevance of what they are learning in school. They see up close what professional standards of excellence look like. They get glimpses of all kinds of jobs that they didn't know about before. They see what the daily life in a workplace is like. They meet adults who are interested in them and see their

value. Every seminar has at least one impact experience; most will have more.

Students were excited to talk about their impact experiences:

→ **Mckenna** described the impact of going to a fiber arts museum. "It changed my perspective on art and how we perceive art. I had always thought art was a painting on the wall. Now I know art can come in a lot of forms. I realized that quilts can be fine art as well." She has taken quilting classes and is working on her own quilt, including doing all the mathematics to design it.

→ **Alvie** told me she liked solving problems and is interested in science. She started getting interested in forensic science. She explained, "The teachers linked me up to people so I can see what a forensic scientist does." She explained that science used to be something you read about. Now learning science has real purpose because it is going to be part of her future.

→ **Cam**, new to Pathways High this year, explained what a seminar on the history of Milwaukee, (described below) meant for him, "I realized that the real world is a game that we are playing without knowing it. When you look closely at the rules, you can see some people have more advantages than others. For example, the trolley is free for the upper income neighborhood but we have to pay $2.25 for the bus. Once you start understanding the economic dynamics, you realize that there are usually different sets of rules. It's important to understand those rules if you want to succeed."

Kim Taylor, Pathways Director, explained, "Impact experiences are contagious. Students hear about each other's experiences. They want more of them. They start to see opportunities around them. If you care about something, nothing is going to stop you. You can't be held back." Emphasizing that students need to have voice and learn to advocate for themselves, she continued, "We don't want to be the only ones to open the door to relationships for students. They need to learn how to make cold calls themselves. They need to learn how to ask for a job shadow or informational interview. If they are interested enough, they will make it happen."

Taylor added, "Too many schools continue to be constrained by the idea that school is separate from the community. Job shadowing can seed interests. However, we want more than that. We want our students in the community -- doing things and meeting people as much as possible." Michelle Raynier, Operations Manager, explained, "We manage the budgets to have the biggest impact on students. That means we put as much as we can toward great teachers, low teacher:student ratios, and impact experiences."

Pathways High also looks for impact experiences for teachers. They surveyed their

staff about their own interests, what they might do if they weren't a teacher, what they like to read and learn about outside of school. Based on that, they have started creating impact experiences such as following a state legislator around for the day. They encourage teachers to learn about jobs that might be interesting to them. A health sciences teacher also teaches art. Why not learn about what a medical illustrator's work is like? This has changed hiring practices as well. They now seek to understand the interests and relationships teachers bring to the job.

Pathways High also offers the option of an Impact Year as a fifth year of high school. The year is entirely personalized, unless students are still pursuing their mastery credits for graduation. Most students will spend a significant amount of time off campus in different experiences such as apprenticeships, internships, industry certification programs, and college classes (up to two dual enrollment courses per semester.) A capstone project and some "give back" to the community opportunities are also expected by the end of the Impact Year.

Elliott, a student from a neighboring suburb, took advantage of Impact Year by doing an internship at First Stage, a Milwaukee children's theater. During that year he wrote and produced a play. His experience expanded his interest in becoming a playwright and was a major part of his application to college and helped to get a scholarship.

Seminars and Subjects

Students take three nine-week, interdisciplinary seminars at a time. They can choose among five to seven seminars based on what sounds interesting and which standards they can develop. The seminars are organized around project-based learning and impact experiences. Pathways has organized standards into six domains: communication arts, civic engagement, STEM science, STEM math, design thinking, and future readiness.

An example of a seminar is *Upscaling History: Finding Milwaukee's Secrets*. Below is the description:

> *Do you know the history of this neighborhood, our building and the north side of Milwaukee? Did you know that a neighborhood nearby had been built over graveyards, there are haunted buildings in the city and all kinds of secrets living around us? Did you know that the street names of Milwaukee have significant meanings? Have you ever wondered about a specific building in Milwaukee, how Milwaukee came to be the city it is, how segregation happened in Milwaukee or wanted to know the stories of our city?*
>
> *This seminar will lead you to find these answers and learn about the city in many ways. We will investigate the history of the city starting with the immigrant communities and native communities that settled and evolved in the city. Will will explore the impact of natural commodities, farming, industry, native influence and the great migration of brown and black people to the city. A large focus will be placed on learning about Milwaukee's Bronzeville, the community our school resides in. Bronzeville was historically a haven for black-owned businesses and a thriving middle and upper-class community. Weaved into our learning will*

be working with experts, doing fieldwork and using first-person research. We will use impact experiences in the community, do scavenger hunts, use local history experts such as the Milwaukee County Historical Society to pave the way for our final project. The final project will be creating an App to tell the story of a specific location, topic, event or series of events in Milwaukee's history. We will focus on the power of story, history, knowing your past to connect people to our city.

Students use Milwaukee: City of Neighborhoods, as well as many other local resources, as base texts, with much of the learning through Impact Experiences that included: a bus tour, local historical museum trips, city scavenger hunts, working with local experts on specific locations and history of Milwaukee, and trips to multiple local historical sites. There are weekly milestones for what students need to complete. The final product is to design an app with wiring framing and visual images for one historical place or event.

The syllabus for the seminar includes the specific Empower skills (see below) students will be developing including ownership and refinement. Examples of the standards students will be working toward include:

Analysis of Historical Documents and Themes: Students can analyze historical information or social studies documents and themes using the procedure of breaking down a topic of study, documents, or event into parts or components.

Quality Supporting Evidence: Use literary and informative texts for evidence.

Formal Written Expression (Mastery Credit): Student can integrate and evaluate multiple sources and writes arguments using valid reasoning and sufficient evidence to inform and explain complex ideas clearly through writing. Student can defend the choices they make using evidence in the written expression.

Iteration and Prototyping (Mastery Credit): Student uses risk-taking, curiosity and past experience to create multiple iterations for prototypes and visual models. Students can create maquettes, 3D models, experimental 3D designs and final prototypes for new products, technologies and intellectual property.

Please note that some of the standards are mastery credits that meet or work towards graduation level standards. Students may make progress toward those standards, or they may seek to demonstrate that they have reached the performance goal through polished artifacts.

All of the graduation standards are taught through seminars. Cohort, as described below, helps to build the specific skills needed to meet the seminar milestones and learn skills to help apply the skills deeply in seminars. Math and reading also have additional dedicated time each day. Reading time is at lunch. Students start off the day each morning on ALEKS.

The Cohorts

Pathways High has created a three-phase class called cohort. The first cohort is for new students regardless of their age or grade. It's designed to build community, instill the values that hold the community together, and introduce students to the way that Pathways works. The day I visited, the new student cohort was working on group presentations regarding a community service project. Joining a table, I saw students developing leadership and citizenship; team building; shared values; oral communication skills; and how to use presentation software. In addition to community building, the first cohort also becomes familiar with the design thinking they will use in all of their seminars and throughout their Pathways experience.

The second cohort is focused on academics. Students learn and practice the skills they will need in their seminars such as annotation, research, and informative writing. Pathways developed the second cohort because of how hard it can be to do project-based learning and help students build all the standards and specific skills they need at the same time. The cohort time allows students to have dedicated time to learn the foundational pieces of the skill.

Students move to the third cohort when they've developed the skill set of the second cohort. The focus is on college and careers, and most students are juniors and seniors. Angelique Byrne referred to this as "pick your own adventure." Students are able to choose different sessions that align with their needs and their interests. While I was there that day, students were in small groups exploring careers. At the table next to me, a student gasped, "Look how much a massage therapist makes! My word!" Students also meet with teachers regarding their preparation for college admissions and if they have selected the Mastery Transcript, the artifacts they will include.

EMPOWER

Each week students spend time exploring and working on their passion projects during *empower hour*. This isn't extra intervention time. It's time dedicated to developing projects that are important to them.

In the original design of Pathways, the founders identified seven skills and traits that are developed through projects. These are the Empower skills: **E**vidence, **M**indfulness, **P**roblem-solving, **O**wnership, **W**orking together, **E**xploring perspectives, and **R**efinement. Once a week, there are "shout outs" during all school town halls that recognize a student who has demonstrated one of the empower skills. Students know teachers are paying attention

to the skills in seminar, in cohorts, and out in the community during impact experiences.

EMPOWER SKILLS

E EVIDENCE - Selects relevant data or documentation to prove mastery of personal or group goals.

M MINDFULNESS - Develops an awareness of personal strengths and motivations to understand their effects.

P PROBLEM SOLVING - Demonstrates the ability to use critical thinking to form, evaluate, & implement solutions.

O OWNERSHIP- Accepts full or shared responsibility for the success or failure of work.

W WORKING TOGETHER - Uses written and verbal communication to create consensus in high risk situations.

E EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES - Incorporates multiple points of view to support and develop work.

R REFINEMENT - Integrates critiques and peer reviews as part of improvement process.

Monitoring Progress

The grading system is organized around standards in the six domains, not by courses or seminars. Seminars are designed around a number of standards, and students select some of them as their learning goals. The grading system monitors student progress based on credit achieved toward the mastery credits as well as individual goals for the year. Pathways High has three levels for grading: mastery, proficient, and in progress. To graduate, students will need to reach proficient

or mastery in all foundational mastery credits. Cam, a senior, explained, "In my old school, we just had to memorize and then get tested. It didn't let me be the best student. Here at Pathways High, we actually do things with what we are learning. They expect me to learn and show them I've learned it."

Students aren't expected to reach every standard in one nine-week seminar, as the seminars are multi-age and students have a variety of skill levels. Students know they are working toward the standards and the credits over 4 years. The goal is that by the time they graduate, students have the foundational mastery credits and at least a few advanced credits where they excel. Pathways would expect a 4-year college-bound student have 2-4 advanced Mastery Credits complete by the time they graduate.

"The focus is on the depth of the learning. You can't separate the grading system from the overall structure. This is why a standards-based approach over 4 years is important. " noted Byrne. "If you are going to move toward standards-based learning and create living and breathing grades that change as students learn, then you are going to need structures that are going to live and breathe as well. You'll need flexible structures that move forward and slow down as the student moves."

> There would be a risk that the multiple components of the learning model could become isolated and programmatic if they aren't held together by a framework of what students should know and be able to do. This is a combination of standards as well as the high level empower skills. They are also held together by the never-ending belief that every student wants to be successful.
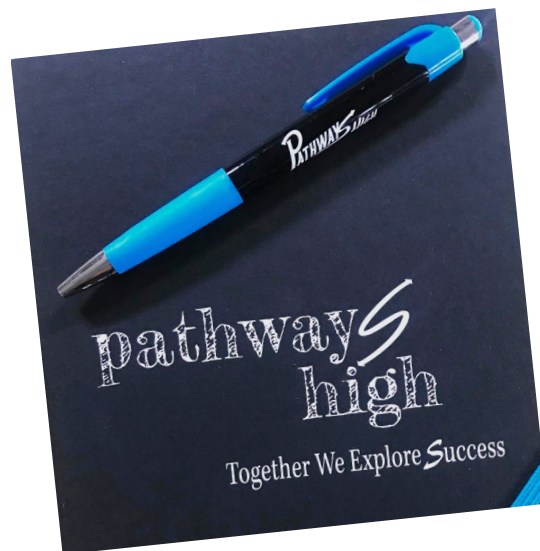
Pathways Prepares for the Mastery Transcript

"I'm the pilot child for the Mastery Transcript," explained Xio, a senior at Pathways High School in Milwaukee. As one of the four pilot schools, Pathways seniors have a choice between using a traditional transcript and the Mastery Transcript. She continued, "The Mastery Transcript allows me to tell my story. I like to be ahead of the game all of the time. But I missed a lot of time in my sophomore and junior year. The GPA doesn't tell my story at all. A regular transcript would have shown that I missed school and dropped some classes. But it doesn't show that the classes were dropped because of absence, not because I wasn't doing the work. The Mastery Transcript shows how much I worked the other years and where I got to."

Telling Your Story

Xio said it is easy to pick artifacts. She started listing off some ideas: a math paper, a poetry book, and one of her art pieces with the artist's statement. As we move forward with using the Mastery Transcript as a whole school, one of the roles of advisors will be to help students select their artifacts and to coach them in polishing them along with help from the content experts as the person who will award the credit and review the artifacts. Angelique Byrne, curriculum director described this role and also allowed me to sit in with a student who was just beginning the process to prepare for the Mastery Transcript. For example, teachers coach students about:

→ Prompting students to think about what story they want to tell and asking what artifacts will tell that story. This isn't a one-time conversation. Start early. Some students will need help in telling their story, some in polishing the artifacts, and some in improving their organizational skills. It will be better for students to have many artifacts to choose from that they are proud of, that they would want to show a college advisor, scholarship reviewer or even a future employer.

→ Selecting artifacts that provide insights into who the student is and what they can do. If possible, these should represent a variety of skills and interests.

→ Using formal and professional language. Byrne was working with a student that described her art process as "mash-up". Byrne asked "what about multimedia?" In so doing, students begin to understand why proper terminology is important and how it connects to the real world and how people perceive you.

→ Identifying a photograph that captures a learning experience such as an internship is very important. These images tell part of the story. A poor image can ruin that story quickly. The artifact itself might be a description of a project such as lesson planning for an

internship at a child development center. Mastery Transcript calls for a visual that can capture the admissions officers' interest. What picture will best capture the learning? A picture of the student with students? Students engaged in the lesson? This also forces students to think about other real world situations such as using other people's images. In the case of a child care center, the student might need closely cropped images of students hands making something verses using their face. The transcript really helps to bridge those learning gaps for students future portfolio building in college or even tasks in future jobs.

→ Learning to take photographs that intentionally highlight what is important to describe in the transcript (as compared to just any photo from phones). For example, photographing 3-D art is very complicated. Students will need to plan ahead, learn how to capture a image that works for the piece and take multiple images before the artwork is no longer around for easy access. Byrne stated "The best thing we can do is start training students to take images of work early in their years at Pathways High it becomes part of their process."

Byrne explained, "The Mastery Transcript is designed so that students can show they have the foundational mastery credits needed for graduation as well as advanced mastery credits that allow them to shine. Students may develop the advanced mastery credits outside of school but will always need a teacher of record to certify that the work is advanced. We expect a student who is going to college to have two to four advanced mastery credits."

Mastery Credits

The Mastery Transcript has been developed to offer two levels of credits: foundational and advanced. This two-tiered approach is proving helpful to Pathways as they continue to develop their learning model. It is expected that everyone will demonstrate they have met the performance level of the foundation credits. Think of them as the graduation requirements. The flexibility of standards and mastery credits means that students aren't trapped by a time-based system. They've got several years to reach proficiency or decide to go for mastery. Advanced credits are personalized; students earn advanced credits in areas of special interest.

Pathways has aligned their original set of standards to the foundation mastery credits. Students can see how each standard in a seminar contributes to a foundation credit. A standard may be a step in the progression or set as the performance level of proficiency. (Remember: Pathways doesn't use grade level standards.) If they want to go for an advanced mastery credit, they will aim for creating a portfolio of work or tackle an advanced topic through a long term, in depth project.

Here's an example in the Mastery Credit domain, Design Thinking. Below are four of the standards students work through that are included in this domain. Students could include artifacts that align with any of these standards to show they have strong evidence for Design Thinking to be awarded a Mastery Credit at the foundation level. It's a credit that is set at the level all students should meet for graduation. It is expected that all students learn how to incorporate

Technology in Design and Foundational Design Concepts as part of the progression towards Mastery of the Design Thinking domain. Students who meet the performance level for Advanced Topics in Visual Communication will earn advanced mastery credits through a portfolio of advanced work applying the foundational skill at a higher level.

Technology in Design: Students will use technology appropriate to their designs and final products to enhance the communication, aesthetics and overall design

Foundational Design Concepts: Students will learn to use the elements of art and principles of design to make choices in their visual design models, sketches and final products. is also a more introductory level. However, the standard is high enough that they will be able to add artifacts to their portfolio that might be included on the Mastery Transcript.

Design Thinking and Innovation: Students can use the ideation and design thinking process to innovate. Students will understand and execute the use of the ideation/design thinking process when creating new designs and planning final products.

Advanced Topics in Visual Communication: Students can create artwork with advanced execution of skill combined with advanced use of design concepts and advanced storytelling through visual narrative. is set at the advanced mastery level.

Even though Pathways is only in the third year of operation, it is on its way toward creating a mastery-based diploma. One of their next steps is to pair back and refine standards with rubrics and examples to show students what it means to earn mastery credit at the foundation level.

Engaging Local Colleges

The Pathways team is meeting with local colleges to help them prepare an effective school profile to accompany the Mastery Transcript. In a conversation with a local university, considered to be one of the top 100 colleges but with a much lower ranking on social mobility, highlighted the problematic behavior of colleges in finding a data point to compare students. The Dean of Admissions said they want to know how many possible advanced credits there are

so they can understand how many a student earned. Their initial reaction is to make advanced mastery credits similar to Advanced Placement credits. They want to know if a student mastered two advanced credits when they could have mastered eight. Kim Taylor, Pathways Director, commented, "The colleges have a ranking mentality. They don't understand that it isn't the quantity that's important — it's the quality of the work."

Conversations with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UW-M) suggests that colleges with an interest in increasing diversity and serving the broader community will see the value in the Mastery Transcript. With efforts underway to strengthen the pipeline for first-generation students (i.e., the first in their family to go to college), UW-M sees the value of describing how academic achievement fits into a broader understanding of students' lives. The Mastery Transcript will provide students with more flexibility in telling their story.

Byrne shared an insight about portfolios that both high schools and colleges should consider. "Art and design schools admissions criteria are all focused on a portfolio-based approach," she said. "Most other types of colleges and universities use GPA, ACT and a rank to determine achievement. If a student wants to be an engineer, one of the most competitive fields there is, shouldn't college want to see a portfolio to show what they can do, not just how well they test?" Perhaps one day the finance and engineering departments of colleges will help students develop students' portfolio of work instead of relying on examinations and the bell curve. Think about it. A portfolio of work would be just as useful to help someone get a job, whether it is straight out of high school or college, whereas the GPA is nearly useless in the labor market.
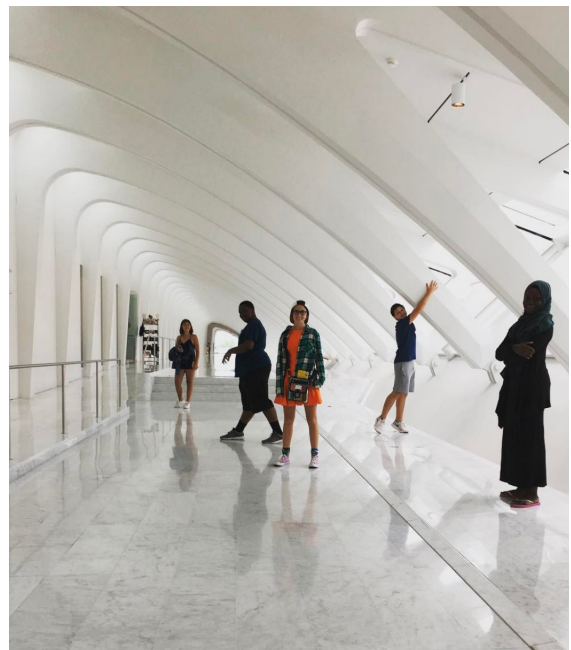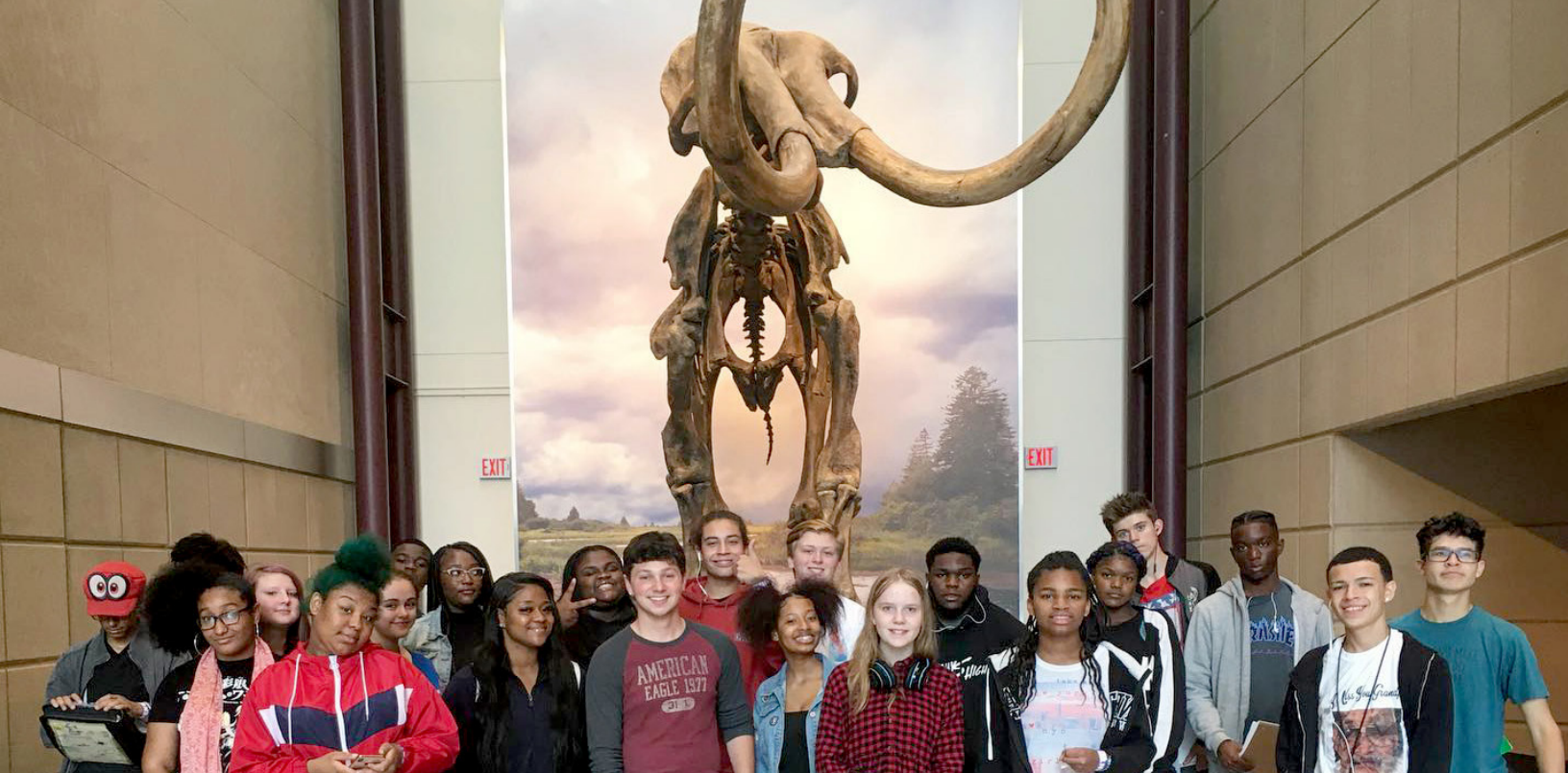
Diverse by Design at Pathways

The founders were intentional that Pathways High School would be "diverse by design." The original thought was that the high school would draw from suburban and urban communities. In its third year, although still open to students from neighboring suburbs, Pathways is increasingly drawing its student body from Milwaukee's public schools as well as independent schools that use similar learning models such as Waldorf and Montessori.

However, the team at Pathways is clear. Diverse by design isn't just the mix of feeder schools. It's not just the racial and economic mix of the student body. Diverse by design is a culture, a set of structures and an instructional strategy that helps every student succeed.

How does a school that has so much diversity also keep an eye on equity? At CompetencyWorks, we often spoke of having "an equity framework" to guide schools in ensuring that every student would benefit from mastery-based approaches. However, Pathways isn't using a framework. It's not through special programs. It is a targeted universal approach — setting universal goals

with targeted processes. Taylor explained, "We want all of our students to have the type of education that elite schools offer. We want the education to be meaningful and enriching, with students using their creativity and solving problems. Too often, low-income schools use a pedagogy of poverty that relies on control, direct instruction, and memorization."

Pathways has established a set of graduation standards — the foundational mastery credits — that all students will know and show evidence they are able to do. Students will also earn advanced mastery credits in the domains that are the most meaningful to them. To help all students reach the graduation

standards, Pathways uses a three-part strategy — trust, choice, and voice — that is deeply rooted in the research on learning and adolescent development.

Trust: Walking Alongside Students

To build trust with students, the Pathways team invest in respectful relationships. This begins by using an asset lens. Instead of complaining, "Look at that kid, he barely pays attention in class," the asset lens flips it so that the same behavior is respectfully considered. "Look at that kid, he comes to school every day even though he works from 4 to midnight." The problem isn't that he falls asleep in class. The problem to be solved is that he needs more sleep. Maybe finding a place for him to take a nap during lunch might be all he needs.

When you are diverse by design, you need to be prepared to support the most so-called "at risk" and the most privileged with an understanding that both may be vulnerable. That both may have been traumatized in their lives. And with the understanding that the intensity and frequency of traumatic experiences may have implications for learning. Kim Taylor, Director of Pathways, explained, "Many teenagers have anxiety. However, you have to understand students' experiences to understand the different layers of trauma. Some kids fear for their safety more than others. Some witness violence more frequently than others."

This was evident when I glanced at the poster on a wall with a group of students' lists of hopes and fears for ninth grade. Many of the items on the list are what you would expect from any teenager: friends and fun. But the last ones on the list — fears of sickness and dying and a hope that they will survive — are those of a young person living among violence and poverty. Pathways staff and the learning model need to be ready to support both.

Hopes and fears for 9th grade

HOPES	FEARS
Making friends	Not making friends
Having fun	Failing
Building skills	Being left out
Learn something	Anxiety
To live	Sickness, dying

Taylor explained that their orientation was all about how you approach kids. "Kids don't need to be fixed," she said. "But adults often want to fix them. So we describe their behavior as a problem. But kids know when we are trying to fix them. They know when we think there is something wrong with them that needs to be fixed. And they aren't going to trust us when that happens. Who would? It doesn't show respect."

Taylor continued, "There is another way. At Pathways, we walk along next to students. We get to know them and find out what is important to them. It can be a mindshift for adults. We often bring assumptions about how the world should be and how students should act. But when we judge before understanding, we break trust. And if students don't trust us, then we aren't going to be able to teach them."

Voice: Learning to Impact Your Environment

Pathways is dedicated to helping students find and use their own voice — to know what they want and to be able to advocate

for themselves. Taylor explained using the example of a student who comes late every day. "Let's say you have punctuality issues," she said. "We could just say 'Get to school on time.' Instead, we are going to ask you what your morning is like. Let's walk through it with them and find out what the problem is. Sometimes it is as simple as they need to set their alarm earlier. But it's likely that there is some complicating issue that is going to require us to be flexible in some way, such as a late start. The key is that through this process, we ask them to own the problem and to use their navigation skills to find solutions. We want them to think, I know I'm going to miss this class. What can I do? What should I do? Who do I need to talk to? And then engage with others to find a solution. As they develop these skills, they are also developing accountability."

Pathways staff and teachers talked about their intentionality in helping students develop their voice as they develop these skills. Students develop voice as they explore topics through multiple perspectives. They learn to analyze and evaluate complex situations. Through projects and impact experiences in the seminars, cohorts, and empower hour, students encounter challenges. The staff doesn't try to fix the students or problems in their lives. Instead, they coach them in analyzing the problem, thinking about solutions, and developing their voice to engage others in helping them resolve issues as they develop.

Pathways is helping students to mature. They are helping them to become young adults. But it is more than that. They are helping students — many of whom have had their spirit battered by a world that can feel terribly cruel at times — become someone with agency who can influence the world around them.

Choice: Practice in Building Agency

In a small group conversation, three students

started listing off the afterschool clubs they are in, the internships they are involved with, their current passion projects and the ones they want to do next, the books they are reading and the ones they want to read. These were kids with interests — lots and lots of interests.

Pathways consistently uses interests, options, and choice to engage and motivate students. It's a critical strategy to respond to the diversity of their student population. There isn't going to be one curriculum, topic, or book that is going to engage everyone. It also helps to develop intrinsic motivation, a critical aspect of the Pathways learning model. Art is one of more powerful hooks. Seminars often have opportunities for artistic expression. Broadening horizons through impact experiences provides more options for students to consider and more possible topics to be interested in as well. Students discover and connect with their passions. Angelique Byrne, curriculum director, emphasized, "We underestimate students. Once you give them the space, they fly."

Choice also creates mini-scenarios for teachers to coach students in making good decisions. There isn't any reason to wait until a problem develops. Decision-making becomes a transparent process where teachers can talk to students about their reasoning and the criteria they are considering.

The Teacher Mindset

"Mindsets drive action," Taylor explained. "The mindsets of our teachers makes all the difference in the daily experience of our students. Teachers have to be vulnerable enough to question their own assumptions. They have to be vulnerable enough to really listen to students." Taylor says that she hires like startups hire. "We look for teachers with the right mindsets. We look for that startup mentality. We look for people who embrace change. We look for teachers with a lot of interests. Our world keeps changing. Our kids keep changing. That means the way we do things at Pathways High will keep changing. We look for people who love to learn because there is going to be a lot of on-the-job training. We need teachers who embrace the when-you-know-better-you-do-better model. "

Taylor explained that problems develop when schools send out signals that knowing students means to know their test scores. "We have to stop cramming test data down the throats of teachers while also wanting them to take risks," she said. "Standardized test scores aren't about success. They are dangerous when they drive school behavior. They take away teacher autonomy and teachers' stories We are in dangerous territory when we rely solely on test data to create student narratives, not only because students are more than a test score, but also because I believe teachers become apathetic. Teachers need to be good—great—people readers and rely on what they know about each child to make informed decisions. If we tell teachers what they know doesn't matter because the score will tell us, then our knowledgeable professionals stop doing the important work of becoming a part of the child's world. They take away kids' autonomy and kid's stories.

"What does it mean to take away our stories? It means to take away the humanity that allows relationships to flourish and a culture of belonging to form. To take away our stories undermines the conditions needed to help students learn. In the end, both teachers and students need to feel valued, which goes back to the mantra that 'all students (teachers) WANT to be successful.'"

Megan Goers, an art teacher, and Chris Kjaer, a math teacher, spoke to the importance of getting to know their students. They explained that they design seminars in ways that allow them to get to know the students. Giving students choice allows them to find out what they are interested in. Goers explained, "We meet students where they are at and push them where they want to go. We have to meet them with vulnerability until there is trust. We have to be willing to tell students our stories if we expect them to tell them theirs." Kjaer added, "When trust is there and the relationships are strong, we can find and walk the line of shared responsibility."

A shared commitment to everyone's success and shared responsibility is what it means to be diverse by design at Pathways.