



The Four Essentials Narrative

Diploma Plus (DP) schools chart a new path to success for young people who have not reached their potential in a traditional secondary school setting. Diploma Plus combines high expectations for every student, a competency-based and standards-aligned approach, a small personalized learning environment, and opportunities to make connections between classroom learning and the world outside the school walls. DP students gain strong academic and life skills, and valuable college and work experiences that prepare them for a successful transition to post-secondary education and careers.

Diploma Plus is an adaptable model, designed to work in a variety of educational settings. DP Schools range in size from 250 to 400 students and can have a variety of organizational affiliations – they may be charter schools, district-sponsored small schools, alternative high schools, special county office of education-sponsored schools, community college-based high school programs, or educational collaborative-supported regional schools. The typical Diploma Plus student is able to graduate with a high school diploma within two to four years of enrollment (possibly more), depending on individual student needs and skill level at entry.

Diploma Plus Schools create and support a positive and innovative learning environment, by providing four essential elements that support student success. These four essentials, described below, are fully implemented in all Diploma Plus Schools.

1. Performance-Based System

Diploma Plus Schools provide curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are focused on knowledge, skills, and understandings – on students “uncovering” meaning at their own pace, not on teachers “covering” a set of content standards in a prescribed period of time. In DP, rigorous curriculum, effective instructional practices, and authentic assessment are competency-based and standards-aligned, and built into a performance-based promotion, and graduation structure. In addition, the DP model calls for the use of student-centered instructional strategies to engage students in learning and facilitate their skill development.

The following Performance-Based System is in place in all Diploma Plus Schools.

A. Rigorous Curriculum

Diploma Plus Schools demonstrate a strong level of academic rigor throughout the curriculum. Rigorous curriculum is vital to the success of DP students, both while they are in high school and for their future success in college, career, and life. It is less about extensive and broad coverage of all standards, and more about demonstrating ability in the core Diploma Plus Competencies, through increasingly difficult content material in Prioritized Standards. DP Schools use the following approaches:

1. *Competency-based and standards-aligned curriculum*

The DP Competencies, along with prioritized district and/or state standards, serve as the basis for curriculum in the core academic disciplines. Both the DP Competencies and the Prioritized Standards are present in all aspects of curriculum design, including: the scope and sequence, syllabi, lesson plans, and assignments. When schools use curriculum that integrates both the DP Competencies and the Prioritized Standards, they can be certain that they are using a rigorous

curriculum that, when paired with effective instructional practices, allows students to not only learn but truly understand the expected content and skills. This occurs since the Diploma Plus Competencies emphasize the critical thinking and analytical skills that allow students to deeply engage in the material as mathematicians, scientists, writers, historians, etc. Schools are also encouraged to use the DP Competencies developed to guide technology, foreign language, English language learning, visual and performing arts, health and fitness, career and technical education, and personal skills.

2. *Backward Design*

DP curriculum development begins with identifying what students need to *know, understand, and be able to do* for a course or subject. Using a backward planning process (e.g. Understanding by Design or UbD), appropriate DP Competencies and state content standards are identified; followed by decisions about final products and performances, authentic assessments, and curricula, lessons, and materials to enable students to meet the Prioritized Standards through demonstrated ability in the DP Competencies.

3. *Appropriate materials and resources*

In Backward Design, the selection of appropriate materials and resources is driven by decisions about what students need to know, understand, and be able to do. Therefore, Diploma Plus Schools select textbooks, projects, software, and other resources that emphasize the DP Competencies and the Prioritized Standards while supporting effective instructional and assessment practices.

B. Effective Instructional Practices

The following instructional practices serve as the fundamental vehicle for delivering the rigorous curriculum described above. Using research-based practices that support performance-based education, DP Schools develop, support, and provide quality and passionate instruction in all areas. These effective practices include the following components.

1. *Competency-based and standards-aligned instruction*

Instruction in the Diploma Plus classroom is always intentionally and explicitly connected to the DP Competencies and the Prioritized Standards. Teachers present lessons that provide students with the opportunity to apply the DP Competencies to the content and skills identified in the Prioritized Standards. The DP Competencies are used to frame all lessons and are structured to support the content being taught. They are the “how” students learn the content they are required to know.

2. *Student-centered instruction*

Student-centered instruction emphasizes students’ cultures, interests, backgrounds, and abilities as the center for planning, instruction, and assessment. Teachers accomplish this by differentiating instruction to focus on providing equal access to the curriculum through a variety of activities, materials, and assessments designed to meet all students’ needs and abilities. Student-centered instruction operates within the framework that students learn and retain more knowledge when the material is consciously and relevantly explained and connected to students’ experiences and interests. This approach stimulates student curiosity and enhances the desire to learn. Teachers use these culturally responsive practices, materials, and assessments in order to encourage students to work in familiar ways and build on their deeply rooted personal and group

beliefs and identities. Unlike traditional instructional models, in student-centered instruction the teacher acts more as a guide and shares control of the learning environment - thus resulting in higher student motivation, effort, and achievement. Student-centered instruction encourages students to actively engage in creating, analyzing, and discussing content specific information while sharing perspectives, posing differing viewpoints, working together to draw conclusions, and making choices about and evaluating their own learning.

3. ***Engaging and rigorous instruction***

In order for instruction to be engaging and rigorous, students must operate within an active learning paradigm. Students should feel they are in a learning lab where their experiences and abilities to explore, apply, and analyze their learning is encouraged and where all learning styles and different types of intelligences are served. Engaging and rigorous instruction requires that all students are accountable for developing deep understandings of the content to be learned. Diploma Plus provides the examples of instructional practices such as: the workshop model, project and inquiry based learning, and interdisciplinary thematic units because they focus on student-centered instruction and active learning practices. They also are research-based, shown to be effective, and represent the progressive side of instructional reform.

4. ***Whole-school teaching and learning strategies***

These strategies include instructional tools and ways of thinking that the entire staff, regardless of content area, identifies as beneficial for students to define, articulate, and use over the course of their learning. They are educational approaches that the school researches and decides it will interpret and apply in all learning environments. Examples include literacy across the curriculum, use of specific research-based learning, or common approaches to career and college readiness.

C. Authentic Assessment

DP Schools emphasize authentic assessment in order to help students make the connection between the content they are expected to learn and how they learn it. Diploma Plus Schools assess students on competencies because they are discipline specific skills that allow students to demonstrate how deeply they understand and can use the Prioritized Standards. DP Schools use the following assessment methodologies.

1. ***Competency-based and standards-aligned assessments***

In all DP Schools, products and performances are created or identified to demonstrate the Prioritized Standards, and are assessed using the rubrics developed for the DP Competencies. Diploma Plus Schools use assessments that allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the Prioritized Standards through the DP Competencies. It is important to remember that the DP Competencies remain the same through all DP Phases, but students are expected to demonstrate mastery of more challenging content and skills from defined Prioritized Standards as they progress through the school.

2. ***Authentic products and performances***

DP students are assessed, as much as possible, on authentic products and performances, i.e. students must be able to talk about, perform, write, and create products that demonstrate what they know and can do in authentic ways. Students must be able to identify the target audience and adapt their work accordingly.

3. *Developmental and Gateway Portfolios*

In all DP Schools, every student is required to have a Developmental Portfolio that contains his or her accumulation of significant work for each content area. The Developmental Portfolio is designed to engage the student in reflection on his or her learning, as a living document demonstrating his or her progress, and as a body of work to show academic growth. Developmental Portfolios also serve as a formative assessment for teachers to track and assess student progress in the Prioritized Standards and the DP Competencies.

Students are also required to create and present culminating Gateway Portfolios in order to be promoted or graduate from each phase in which they have been enrolled. The Gateway Portfolio is comprised of the student's best work from each content area, as either original or revised documents from the Developmental Portfolio, relevant standardized test scores, as well as future focus and advisory experiences, and demonstrates his or her understanding of the Prioritized Standards through the DP Competencies. In DP Schools, the Gateway Portfolio is used as an authentic, summative assessment of the student's learning.

4. *Continuous assessment*

It is important to regularly assess students because learning happens on a continuum. Continuous assessment is crucial in providing feedback to the teacher on the effectiveness of classroom instruction, and for teachers and students to know how well the students are doing. Frequent assessment also allows students to have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning. Assessment at Diploma Plus Schools is both formative and summative and traditional and alternative.

D. Promotion and Graduation Structure

Diploma Plus Schools have a promotion and graduation structure that is designed to support the Diploma Plus Performance-Based System. The promotion and graduation structure is commonly understood and consistently used by all members of the Diploma Plus School community. DP Schools have the following:

1. *Identified promotion and graduation criteria*

Diploma Plus Schools have clear and explicit promotion and graduation criteria that are a combination of required experiences, demonstrated understandings, course requirements, and standardized test scores. Schools establish and use criteria that specify what students need to demonstrate (in terms of Prioritized Standards and DP Competencies) to move from the Foundation Phase to the Presentation Phase to the Plus Phase to graduation. Schools may want to identify specific products, assessments, and portfolio products that provide students the opportunity to demonstrate the required skills (e.g., benchmark assessments). In a DP School, it is required that competency attainment is used (generally through portfolios and report card grades) to determine readiness for promotion.

For a student to move into the Presentation Phase, there must be a review of his or her Foundation Gateway Portfolio and its presentation, as well as evidence of competency attainment outside of the Foundation Portfolio, in order to determine the student's understanding of the Foundation Phase Prioritized Standards in the core disciplines using the DP Competencies.

Similarly, one criterion for a student to move into the Plus Phase is a review of his or her Presentation Gateway Portfolio and its presentation to a panel (including at least one external reviewer). Additionally, students moving into the Plus Phase must demonstrate evidence of competency attainment outside of the Presentation Portfolio, in order to determine their understanding of the Presentation Phase Prioritized Standards in the core disciplines using the DP Competencies. Furthermore, in order to prepare students for their transition to the world after high school, promotion into the Plus Phase should also include a more formal application process, which is comprised of the following elements:

- An application to the Plus Phase that documents the student's maturity, motivation, and skills necessary to be successful in the Plus Phase. This application includes, but is not limited to, a letter of application, teacher recommendations, and college placement test scores (e.g., the "computerized placement tests", "Accuplacer" or other test/assessment used to determine course level placement at local post-secondary institutions where students will take one or more courses while in the Plus Phase).
- A formal assessment of the application materials and performance by an internal committee that is responsible for making recommendations regarding advancement.

Diploma Plus Schools also establish and use criteria for graduation that includes a review the Graduation Gateway Portfolio and its presentation to a panel (including at least one external reviewer), as well as evidence of competency attainment outside of the Graduation Portfolio, in order to determine the student's understanding of the Plus Phase Prioritized Standards in the core disciplines using the DP Competencies. Because the Plus Phase is designed to provide graduates of a Diploma Plus School with clear plans and skills for their futures, the following graduation criteria must also be met (and demonstrated within the Graduation Gateway Portfolio):

- Passing a college course
- Completing a high-quality internship and project
- Designing and implementing a Community Action Project
- Creating an Autobiography Project
- Developing and putting in motion a detailed post-high school plan
- Meeting all other local and state requirements for graduation, including state required exams.

2. *Individualized student pace and progress*

Diploma Plus students progress at the pace that is appropriate for them as individual learners. All students are expected to meet the same Prioritized Standards, yet the length of time it takes each student to meet them is dependent upon the individual. Diploma Plus students are promoted to the next DP Phase or graduate when they demonstrate understanding of the Prioritized Standards for their current phase through the DP Competencies.

Progression from one DP Phase to another is contingent on demonstrating, through a variety of assessments and experiences, ability in the Prioritized Standards and the DP Competencies. Documentation of these assessments and experiences are assembled in the Gateway Portfolios and presented in order to demonstrate students' readiness to progress to the next DP Phase or to graduate. Diploma Plus Schools do not use time-in-seat as criteria for promotion or graduation.

3. ***Articulated scope and sequence aligned to Diploma Plus Phases***

Every Diploma Plus School has an articulated scope and sequence that is aligned to the three DP Phases. The scope and sequence identifies the Prioritized Standards to be learned in each course at each phase, and the promotion and graduation criteria against which student learning will be assessed. Additionally, the scope and sequence at DP Schools includes required Plus Phase experiences (e.g. college and workplace experiences, and the Community Action Project).

4. ***Competency-based tracking and reporting system***

A school-wide system must be implemented for tracking and reporting student competency attainment over time and across subject areas. Student report cards must also document competency attainment in the core academic disciplines. Diploma Plus Schools should use DP.Net or a comparable and approved (by Diploma Plus) system for reliable and efficient competency tracking and reporting.

5. ***Phases to identify and group students***

Developmental phases are used to identify and group students. DP Phases are used to group students based on their learning needs, not by their age or previous credit accumulation. Typically, Foundation Phase students are learning eighth-grade Prioritized Standards, Presentation Phase students are working on tenth-grade Prioritized Standards, and the Plus Phase students are learning twelfth-grade Prioritized Standards.

It is important that the schedule at a Diploma Plus School allows for a student to participate in classes that are at different phases. For instance, a student that has tenth-grade math skills, but reads at the fifth-grade level should be placed in a Presentation math course and a Foundation ELA course. However, a student is not identified as a Presentation Phase student until he or she has met the criteria to be promoted into the Presentation Phase (i.e., this student would be in the Foundation Phase until he or she had demonstrated an ability to use the Prioritized Standards for Foundation Phase in every core class.)

6. ***Intake Assessment and Placement***

Assessments (including tests and other evaluative tools) are used to determine new students' needs and place them in appropriate phases (generally Foundation or Presentation) at all Diploma Plus Schools. Prior courses, credit accumulation, and previously enrolled grade are not the main indicators for placement within a DP School.

7. ***School-wide portfolio system***

A school-wide system for portfolio development, collection, and presentation is in place at all Diploma Plus Schools.

This first includes a plan within the schools that will enable students to develop portfolios for each phase they complete. Items to support the development of a student's portfolio include an adult at the school that is designated to support his or her portfolio development, time incorporated into the school schedule (during advisories, portfolio seminars or portfolio review days/periods) for portfolio development, and curriculum units and assessments that are designed to produce portfolio appropriate work in each subject area.

Diploma Plus Schools also need a collection system that includes the locations, tools, and people responsible for housing both types of portfolios. It is important that there is a school-wide plan for where both Developmental and Gateway Portfolios are stored, that tools such as portfolio expectations, sign-off sheets, etc. are implemented consistently school-wide, and that the entire school knows who is responsible for the different tasks associated with creating a portfolio.

Additionally, DP Schools need to develop a structure to support portfolio presentations. Such a system would need to include details about when and to whom students are presenting, regular opportunities for presentations of Gateway Portfolios, and frequent informal or “practice” presentations that take place during scheduled portfolio development time.

2. Supportive School Culture

Diploma Plus Schools work intentionally to develop a positive and supportive school culture. This culture is developed through specific relationship-building activities and deep-rooted school norms that nurture the strengths of diversity and inclusivity. The following elements of a supportive school culture are in place in all Diploma Plus Schools.

A. Positive Relationships

Diploma Plus Schools are built on positive relationships among students, staff, community partners and parents/families. These relationships are critical to student success. To support positive relationships, DP Schools include several key structures and elements, as described below.

1. *Advisories that develop positive peer and adult-student relationships*

DP Schools implement an advisory structure that serves all students. Regular advisory sessions are scheduled, and provide a setting in which students can develop connections to a key adult who holds high expectations for them, monitors their academic progress, and helps them navigate through high school and prepare for post-secondary education and careers. Advisories should address youth leadership, self-determination and perseverance, mutual respect, and the ability to resolve disputes (as well as other topics). Advisories should help students build strong and productive interpersonal relationships at all phases of the Diploma Plus experience, and incorporate career and college exploration and planning.

2. *School wide rituals, celebrations, and gatherings*

Diploma Plus Schools employ practices such as community meetings, school-wide events, or celebrations that build and reinforce the community spirit and cohesion of the school and intentionally build school culture.

3. *Opportunities for students in each phase to develop a group identity, norms, and relationships*

Diploma Plus Schools plan and hold events such as Phase-specific meetings, special celebrations, Phase-specific trips, etc. that allow students within each individual DP Phase to build relationships, group identities and norms. These opportunities are intentionally designed to support the different needs and issues that are relevant to the distinct phases, create group cohesion and pride, and promote positive peer relationships to foster academic and personal success.

4. *Parents, family, and/or caregivers engaged in the school in meaningful ways*

Teachers and administrators in Diploma Plus Schools have regular communication with all parents, guardians, and/or other significant adults concerning student successes as well as any attendance, socio-emotional, or academic issues. They also pursue ways in which parents, guardians and/or other significant adults can help with homework, support career development and post-secondary planning, and other topics. DP Schools host events for parents, guardians, and/or other significant adults and invite them into the school for a variety of reasons, including: to see student work, gain information about the educational program, and learn about opportunities for students. Parents, guardians, and/or other significant adults are invited to participate in school improvement and decision-making in formal and informal ways and are welcomed on the Diploma Plus campus. Parents and other caregivers are viewed by Diploma Plus Schools as educators of teachers about their children. They are an invaluable resource for the school to learn about their children, the culture and important values of their families, and their connections to the community.

5. ***Collegial and professional learning communities for faculty***

Diploma Plus faculty engage in regular planning time, learning communities, Critical Friends groups, and/or other avenues to build their professional community and deepen the connections to their colleagues. They also actively participate in DP Network activities, and connect with teachers at other Diploma Plus Schools to share quality practices, learn from one another, and collaborate on projects.

6. ***Positive connections to the wider community***

DP Schools develop and maintain strong relationships with parents, families, employers, community organizations, and colleges, with each playing a significant role in aspects of education at a DP School. In addition, and as needed, DP Schools connect students to services that help them attend school regularly and become healthy, self-sufficient adults. Services can be provided on campus or in the community (through community partners, social service agencies, other educational institutions, and workplace partners).

7. ***Positive school norms***

DP Schools work with internal and external community partners to develop positive school norms that are reflected in all aspects of a school's culture. It is important to gain insight from many different resources in order to create and maintain a validating and respectful climate for all school community members.

B. Youth Leadership and Voice

In DP Schools, young people participate in decision-making with adults, mobilize and create or change policy, and take influential leadership roles in key school decisions. Active youth participation is seen as a benefit to the internal and external school community, as well as a benefit to the positive development of young people themselves. DP Schools involve students in various committees, discussions on academic and behavioral codes, and future focus and advisory ideas and issues. To support youth development, voice, and agency, DP Schools provide for significant youth involvement with the DP School and with a student's own education. Youth leadership is a process that each school internalizes and then implements to best-fit student development and achievement needs and outcomes. DP Schools facilitate this revolutionary approach to teaching and learning by developing a school community that is truly democratic by engaging students in critical reflection for positive and effective school change. In a DP School, there is,

at minimum: student representation within school governance; a student advisory board or student council; and student input on individualized, student-centered learning plans.

1. ***Student representation within school governance***

Effectively involving students within school governance is a conscious and deliberate choice made by all DP Schools. Student representatives hold positions on school committees, boards, etc. in order to represent student voice and provide opportunities for student leadership.

2. ***A student advisory board or student council***

DP Schools have a student advisory board or student council responsible for communicating the needs, questions, and desires of students to the staff. These boards are not only a social event planning committee but also a group of elected individuals dedicated to creating change within their school environment regarding all facets of student education. DP Schools' student boards interpret and apply information from the student body, evaluate current program effectiveness, explain what students need, and create ways to positively involve the student body in each element of the school.

3. ***Student input on individualized, student-centered learning plans***

Individualized, student-centered learning plans are essential for student leadership and voice. Effectively involving students in the creation and analysis of their learning plan places students in control of their education. They become active participants instead of passive onlookers; critiquing and working on skills and interests necessary for personal engagement and future success. The learning plan is a necessary way DP Schools strive to engage students in all facets of education and to seek means of facilitating student ownership and reflection of personal learning.

C. Cultural Responsiveness

The role of cultural responsiveness in Diploma Plus Schools is to promote equity and increase greater access to opportunities, goods and services for all within the school community and beyond. Culturally-responsive teaching, learning and assessment, therefore, are critical elements of the school culture of Diploma Plus Schools. Within that context, the schools must create and sustain a school climate that explores, respects and responds to the race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender-identity, religious beliefs, class, physical and mental ability, language, nation of origin, and physical appearance of all those who interact within the school community. To that end, Diploma Plus Schools strive to promote school-wide exploration of issues related to personal and group identity and privilege, recruit faculty and staff that are representative of the Diploma Plus student population, and develop a commitment to learning and responding to personal and group identifies and cultures within the school community. More specifically, Diploma Plus Schools have:

1. ***School wide exploration of issues related to personal and group identity and privilege***

Diploma Plus Schools utilize curriculum materials and resources drawn from a wide range of group identities and backgrounds (including, but not limited to, multi-cultural literary anthologies, exploration of multiple perspectives on American History, development of civilization, surveys of world histories, cultures, religions and traditions). Furthermore, there is strong collaboration with community-based organizations to present speakers, mentors, role-models, and experts across a variety of group memberships, (e.g. Big Brother/Big Sister, Girls Inc., Council of La Raza, LGBT youth organizations, Teaching for Tolerance, etc.) DP Schools also provide instruction, training,

and experiences in team building activities, dialoguing across differences and building positive ally relationships among adult and student peer groups.

2. ***Faculty and staff that are representative of the student population***

DP Schools have faculty and staff that are representative of the student populations through a number of outreach activities. DP Schools actively target the media that represent the communities from which our students come, collaborate with professional and community organizations across group membership to identify potential staff member pools, and prioritize staff experience with diverse populations and a commitment to social justice, equity, and multiculturalism.

3. ***A commitment by faculty and staff to learning and responding to personal and group identities and cultures of their students***

Diploma Plus faculty and staff learn and respond to the personal and group identities and cultures of their students by structuring opportunities to build knowledge, skills, and awareness of issues of diversity and cultural responsiveness and their implications for teaching and learning; providing experiences for faculty and staff to explore their own notions of the impact of group identity and privilege; and increasing the availability of current research, literature, articles about diversity, social justice, and cultural responsiveness.

3. Future Focus

Diploma Plus Schools intentionally support a focus on students' futures through awareness, exposure, and preparation opportunities, providing transitional experiences for students in all DP Phases. This involves a multi-year sequence of career and college exploration activities and opportunities that are embedded in advisories, classroom activities, and out-of-school time. These opportunities include developmentally appropriate and progressively intensive experiences and activities in relation to college and careers in the Foundation and Presentation Phases, in addition to intensive preparation experiences in the Plus Phase. The following experiences and opportunities are provided at all Diploma Plus Schools.

A. Post-secondary Education Preparation

DP Schools provide post-secondary awareness, exploration, and preparation opportunities for their students. These post-secondary education experiences are embedded in every DP Phase, and culminate in the Plus Phase, when students take classes on college campuses and earn college credit while still enrolled at the DP School.

1. ***Post-secondary awareness, exploration, and preparation***

In the Foundation and Presentation Phases, students begin preparing for college and exploring post-secondary options. Students' awareness and exploration of post-secondary education options may include campus visits, web and library research on post-secondary options, interviews with adults about their college experiences, parent engagement to promote college awareness, information on and preparation for college entrance exams (including the PSAT and SAT), financial aid advising, college application process advising, mentoring activities, and the use of a college-friendly high school transcript.

2. *On-campus classes and credits*

In the Plus Phase, students complete one or more post-secondary courses for credit, with most students taking courses on a college campus. Unless exceptional circumstances exist, successful completion of the post-secondary component is considered to be a “C” or better earned in at least one college course delivered on the college campus. To prepare students for the college preparation component, DP Schools arrange tours with their college partners, provide advice on course selection and orientation experiences, and integrate college success skills into classes prior to and during the phase in which students participate in post-secondary coursework. DP Schools and their college partners coordinate schedules and activities to provide counseling and academic support services both at the DP School and on the college campus during the time that students are taking college courses. On-campus classes and credits occur:

- a. On a college campus: A traditional college class (credit or developmental level) taken with other college students; a “sheltered” college class (i.e. offered for high school students only); or a high school class delivered on the college campus but taught by DP staff (supplemented by intentional exposure to the campus and its resources).
- b. At the DP School: A “sheltered” college class (supplemented by intentional exposure to one or more college campuses); or an on-line college class that is taken at the high school (supplemented by intentional exposure to one or more college campuses).
- c. In other post-secondary settings: An occupational training program leading to completion of an industry recognized certification taken with other trainees in a formal training setting.

B. Career Preparation

DP Schools provide career awareness, exploration, and workplace experiences for its students. In addition, Personal Competencies are used throughout the school and in every phase and addressed through the curriculum. In the Plus Phase (or earlier, if appropriate), DP also includes learning-rich internships and workplace experiences.

1. *Career awareness, exploration, and preparation*

Students at Diploma Plus Schools are engaged in career awareness, exploration, and preparation experiences. These include researching a range of career opportunities, understanding workplace expectations, and exposure to a range of careers in classroom and work-based settings. Students learn about the workplace through career fairs, opportunities to talk with people in different professions, hearing from career speakers, connecting with career mentors, and engaging in multiple workplace experiences (i.e., job shadowing, or progressively intensive work-based learning experiences that build career awareness, offer the opportunity to explore careers of interest and prepare students for their Plus Phase internships).

2. *Internships and other workplace experiences*

In the Plus Phase, students participate in a structured and learning-rich internship that provides the students with sustained exposure to a workplace, deep exploration of an industry or career, and strong connections to their co-workers and the workplace supervisor. The internship is supported by a work-based learning plan and is structured to provide for the acquisition of occupational knowledge and skills. Activities in the classroom are also connected to internship experiences, and provide the opportunity for the student to relate academic concepts to real world applications. The student’s performance is assessed by the worksite supervisor and through formal student

reflection. The Plus Phase internship is a powerful and important learning opportunity for all DP students, and represents a significant component of the Plus Phase experience.

3. ***Personal Competencies used throughout the school***

A set of Personal Competencies has been developed to support students in identifying and acquiring the personal skills needed to be successful in both academics and the workplace. These competencies are used along with the subject-specific competencies in order to provide students with necessary feedback and to hold them accountable for these important life skills. In addition, the use of these Personal Competencies helps to reinforce the connection between students' academics and the world of work.

C. Civic Engagement

Diploma Plus Schools also prepare youth to become responsible and engaged participants in their community. DP Schools provide opportunities that engage students in community awareness, exploration, and activities as well as service-learning opportunities and Community Action Projects, including a formal project in the Plus Phase.

1. ***Community awareness, exploration, and preparation***

The DP model encourages students and staff to participate in community awareness, exploration, and preparation throughout each phase at the DP School. This can be accomplished in advisory or connected to students' academic learning. These activities may include: community asset mapping, assessing a local political campaign, service learning projects, interviewing community members about an issue, fundraising for a cause, or partnering with local community organizations to learn about local concerns and projects.

2. ***Community Action Projects***

The Community Action Project, often completed during the Plus Phase, serves a number of purposes, both academic and civic. Community Action Projects can strengthen young people's connections to their communities and the people who live in them. It also serves as an opportunity for students to apply academic learning to a real world application and to improve their teamwork skills through experiences in reaching consensus about what is important and what needs to be done; deciding who will do what piece of the project work; and addressing situations where someone is not doing his or her share. The Community Action Project also has an explicit civic goal. This project enables students to develop civic participation skills, values, and attitudes that can be a critical influence on young people's decisions to get involved in their communities later in life.

4. Effective Supports

Diploma Plus Schools have external and internal structures that support programs and help ensure student success. The following Effective Supports must be in place in all Diploma Plus Schools.

A. Fundamental School Needs

Diploma Plus Schools have the basic school structures in place, including the following.

1. *Positive and functional relationships*

Diploma Plus Schools have positive and functional partnerships with the community, colleges, and businesses, as well as strong relations with local and/or state school districts, and broad community support.

DP model implementation depends upon developing and sustaining a range of effective collaborations with the school district and external partners. These include: full support of the local school district or similar agency (e.g. chartering authority); partnerships with local organizations and governmental entities to provide (or facilitate linkages to) wrap-around support services; partnerships with local employers, employer groups, or workforce development organizations to provide students with a range of career exploration and development experiences and opportunities; and partnerships with local two- and/or four-year colleges and other post-secondary education and training institutions to provide a range of post-secondary exposures and opportunities throughout students' DP experiences, including but not limited to college coursework during the Plus Phase.

2. *Effective operations*

DP Schools are required to have the resources, supports, systems, and staffing that are customary for traditional schools and that are necessary for the school's success. The following components are in place at all Diploma Plus Schools.

- a. Start up and implementation supports
- b. Equitable resources
- c. Appropriate school size
- d. Sufficient and appropriate staffing: this includes (but is not limited to) a full complement of teachers in the major content areas, appropriate staffing for the Plus Phase, appropriate counseling/advisory staff, adequate resources for materials and technology, and resources that allow for staff to have sufficient individual and group professional development time
- e. Range of student support services
- f. Data and evaluation systems¹
- g. Technology systems
- h. Fund development capacity
- i. Effective marketing and communications capacity

B. Programmatic Autonomy

DP Schools must have sufficient authority to incorporate the following autonomies:

¹ In addition to collecting and analyzing data to assess student progress, DP Schools and the Commonwealth Corporation conduct formative and summative evaluations in order to assess the quality and effectiveness of the Diploma Plus approach on an ongoing basis in order to strengthen the program design, deepen implementation of the DP model at schools within the DP network, and increase positive student outcomes. CommCorp is required to report data to its funders and to participate in a range of funder-required evaluation activities. All Diploma Plus Schools are required to cooperate with Diploma Plus evaluation, data collection, and reporting requirements as outlined by the Commonwealth Corporation.

1. ***Create a suitable school community***
 - a. Hire and fire staff
 - b. Enroll students indicating an interest in attending a Diploma Plus School (i.e. students are not just assigned to the DP School)
 - c. Recruit and support the target student population
2. ***Control the school budget***
3. ***Institute appropriate school structure***
 - a. Operate on a schedule and calendar that fit the DP model
 - b. Establish promotion, attendance and discipline policies
 - c. Use performance-based and competency-based assessment to gauge student progress and to set promotion and graduation criteria (While DP students must meet all district/state standards and pass required exams in order to receive a high school diploma, the school must have the flexibility to deviate as necessary from district credit and "time in seat" requirements for promotion and graduation).
 - d. Choose curriculum and resources that supports the DP model
 - e. Set appropriate scope and sequence that supports the DP model. In addition to appropriate course-level scope and sequence, DP Schools must implement the Foundation and Presentation Phase of DP and, either currently or in the future, as students reach their final stages of high school, implement the Plus Phase of DP.

C. Shared and Effective Leadership

DP Schools have shared and effective leadership in order to effectively implement the school's vision and mission through the DP model, develop and work towards the goals in the DP work plan, and sustain and grow the DP model over time.

1. *Shared governance structures*

Shared leadership assures that all staff members' voices are heard and responded to in a professional and respectful way, in order to increase staff participation, development, and sustainability. In a DP School the power structure is not top down nor unilateral; it encourages all staff members to be involved in the process of deciding and implementing key educational, structural, socio-emotional, and developmental goals and objectives for all students.

2. *Effective school administration*

It is essential that Diploma Plus Schools have an effective school administration team. This includes having a dynamic and visionary leader dedicated to implementing the school's mission and vision through the DP model. This administrator is a servant leader who is innovative and seeks to be an effective communicator dedicated to creating systematic change and focusing on increasing student achievement. Additionally, DP Schools must have an effectively operating school administration team (which may include a vice principal, lead teacher, guidance counselor, administrative assistant, adjustment counselor, dean of students, etc.) with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

3. *A Student Achievement Support Team, composed of school leadership, master teachers, counselors, and other key staff*

Diploma Plus Schools have a capable and invested Student Achievement Support Team (SAS Team) designed to implement the school's mission and vision through the DP model, improve and monitor student achievement through DP model implementation, and build sustainability and capacity. The SAS Team meets regularly with the DP School coach to implement and improve the four essentials of Diploma Plus within the school.