



## The Four Essentials Outline

This document outlines the Four Essentials of Diploma Plus Schools.

- **Performance-Based System**
- **Supportive School Culture**
- **Future Focus**
- **Effective Supports**

The following outline provides an overview of each of the Four Essentials and their corresponding elements.

### 1. **Performance-Based System**

Diploma Plus Schools provide curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are focused on knowledge, skills, and understandings.

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

- Competency-based and standards-aligned curriculum
- Backward design
- Appropriate materials and resources

#### **B. Effective Instructional Practices**

DP Schools develop, support, and provide quality and passionate instruction in all areas. Teachers work as masters of their craft and approach instruction with an openness to learn from colleagues and students, a willingness to persevere and understand, and a desire to focus on individual learners through personalized relationships.

DP Schools provide

- Competency-based and standards-aligned instruction
- Student-centered instruction
- Engaging and rigorous instruction
- Whole-school teaching and learning strategies

#### **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.

DP Schools use

- Competency-based and standards-aligned assessments
- Authentic products and performances
- Developmental and Gateway Portfolios
- Continuous assessment

#### **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

- Identified promotion and graduation criteria
- Individualized student pace and progress
- Articulated scope and sequence aligned to the DP Phases
- A competency-based tracking and reporting system
- Phases (Foundation, Presentation, and Plus) to identify and group students
- Intake assessments and placement
- A school-wide portfolio system

## **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. Diploma Plus Schools are committed to fostering positive relationship across all members of the school community, engaging youth leadership and voice, and providing a culturally responsive environment.

The following indicators of a supportive school culture are in place in all Diploma Plus Schools.

### **A. Positive Relationships**

DP Schools have

- Advisories that develop positive peer and adult-student relationships
- School wide rituals, celebrations, and gatherings
- Opportunities for students in each phase to develop a group identity, norms, and relationships
- Parents, family, and/or caregivers engaged in the school in meaningful ways
- Collegial and professional learning communities for faculty
- Positive connections to the wider community
- Positive school norms

### **B. Youth Leadership and Voice**

DP Schools provide for

- Student representation within school governance

- A student advisory board or student council
- Student input on individualized, student-centered learning plans

### **C. Cultural Responsiveness**

DP Schools support

- School-wide exploration of issues related to personal and group identity and privilege
- Faculty and staff that are representative of student population
- A commitment by faculty and staff to learn and respond to personal and group identities and cultures of their students

## **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
- On-campus classes and credits

### **B. Career Preparation**

DP Schools support

- Career awareness, exploration, and preparation
- Internships and other workplace experiences
- Personal competencies used throughout the school

### **C. Civic Engagement**

DP Schools include

- Community awareness, exploration, and preparation
- Community Action Projects

## **4. Effective Supports**

Diploma Plus Schools have external and internal structures that support successful implementation and help ensure student success.

The following effective supports are in place in all Diploma Plus Schools.

## A. Fundamental School Needs

DP Schools have the basic school structures in place, including

- Positive and functional relationships
  - i. Community, college, and business partnerships
  - ii. District relations
  - iii. Community support
- Effective operations
  - i. Start up and implementation supports
  - ii. Equitable resources
  - iii. Appropriate school size
  - iv. Sufficient and appropriate staffing
  - v. Range of student support services
  - vi. Data and evaluation systems
  - vii. Technology systems
  - viii. Fund development capacity
  - ix. Effective marketing and communications capacity

## B. Programmatic Autonomy

DP Schools have sufficient autonomy to

- Create a suitable school community
  - i. Hire and fire staff
  - ii. Enroll students indicating an interest in attending a Diploma Plus School (i.e. students are not just assigned to the DP School)
  - iii. Recruit and support the target student population
- Control the school budget
- Institute appropriate school structure
  - ii. Operate on a schedule and calendar that fit the DP model
  - iii. Establish promotion, attendance and discipline policies
  - iv. Use performance-based promotion and graduation (*While DP students must meet all district/state standards and pass required exams in order to receive a high school diploma, the school has the flexibility to deviate as necessary from district credit and "time in seat" requirements for promotion and graduation.*)
  - v. Choose curriculum that supports the DP model
  - vi. Set appropriate scope and sequence that supports the DP model

## 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.

DP Schools are guided by

- Shared school governance structures
- Effective school administration
- A Student Achievement Support Team, composed of school leadership, master teachers, counselors, and other key staff