



# GOING FOR GOLD

---

## A GUIDE TO LINKED LEARNING GOLD CERTIFICATION™

SEPTEMBER 2019

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*The Linked Learning Alliance would like to thank the many individuals who contributed to the development of the certification standards and process described in this user guide.*

First, we would like to extend our deepest appreciation to the members of the Pathways Standards Advisory Working Group and the Quality Standards Panel, which were convened by the Alliance's Board of Directors in 2016 to create recommendations for Linked Learning pathway quality standards. Since then, the Alliance has implemented the Silver certification process and piloted Gold certification with 13 Linked Learning pathways. This user guide reflects the input and lessons learned through the Gold certification pilot process.

We would like to thank the following individuals for their review of the Gold certification standards and thoughtful feedback throughout the Gold pilot phase:

- **Cindy Bater**, Long Beach Unified
- **Lindsey Corcoran**, Los Angeles Unified
- **Ben Crosby**, ConnectED: The National Center for College and Career
- **Robert Curtis**, Pivot Learning Partners
- **Kelly Gallagher Nick**, Center for Powerful Public Schools
- **Robert Jones**, Carlsbad Unified
- **Pam Kempthorne**, San Bernardino City Unified
- **Grady Lane**, NAF
- **Betsy McKinstry**, Antelope Valley Union High
- **Duane Robertson**, Antelope Valley Union High
- **Jorge Ruiz De Velasco**, John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities
- **Laura Smith**, San Bernardino City Unified
- **Esther Soliman**, Los Angeles Unified
- **Diane Walker**, Antelope Valley Union High
- **Carrie Wiley**, Long Beach Unified

We would also like to thank the district and site administrators, and especially the pathway leads, teachers, and students who participated in the Gold pilot from the following pathways:

- **Biomedical Science Academy**, Eastside HS, Antelope Valley UHSD
- **Cabrillo Academy of Law & Justice**, Cabrillo HS, Long Beach Unified
- **Carlsbad Film Academy**, Carlsbad HS, Carlsbad Unified
- **CORE Academy**, Arroyo Valley HS, San Bernardino City Unified
- **Criminal Justice & Investigation**, McBride HS, Long Beach Unified
- **Critical Design and Gaming School**, Hawkins HS, Los Angeles Unified
- **East L.A. Performing Arts Magnet**, Torres HS, Los Angeles Unified
- **Engineering Pathway**, McBride HS, Long Beach Unified
- **Environmental Science, Engineering & Technology Academy**, Carson HS, Los Angeles Unified
- **Law and Public Service**, Roosevelt HS, Los Angeles Unified
- **Medical and Health Sciences**, Roosevelt HS, Los Angeles Unified
- **Multimedia & Engineering Academy**, Lancaster HS, Antelope Valley Union High
- **Project Lead the Way Biomedical**, Pacific HS, San Bernardino City Unified

## CONTENTS

### Introduction

About Linked Learning Gold Certification . . . . .	3
Submission Deadlines . . . . .	4
Approximate Timeline . . . . .	4

### Preparation

Determine Pathway Readiness . . . . .	5
Form a Certification Team . . . . .	5
Engage in Self-study . . . . .	5

### Execution

Express Intent to Proceed . . . . .	6
Collaborate with a Review Leader . . . . .	6
Collect Artifacts . . . . .	6

### Confirmation

Participate in Preliminary Review . . . . .	7
Prepare for Site Visit . . . . .	8
Host Site Visit . . . . .	9
Review Final Report . . . . .	10

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to help district staff, site administrators, pathway staff, and postsecondary, industry, and student support partners in preparing for Linked Learning Gold certification.

It provides a roadmap to help you understand the certification process, self-assess against the Gold standards, and collect a body of artifacts that reflect the high-quality work and outcomes of the pathway.

### Questions? Suggestions?

Contact the Linked Learning Alliance,  
[certification@linkedlearning.org](mailto:certification@linkedlearning.org)



## ABOUT LINKED LEARNING GOLD CERTIFICATION

**Linked Learning Certification** promotes the continuous improvement of Linked Learning pathways to provide proven high-quality integrated learning experiences and positive student outcomes for all student populations.

Gold certification represents the highest quality standard for Linked Learning pathways and brings valued public recognition of the exemplary work being done by Linked Learning pathway staff, students, and partners.

Gold certification standards, summarized below, were piloted in 2018–19 to emphasize college and career learning experiences and equitable outcomes for all students. Access the complete standards at [LinkedLearning.org/Certification](https://www.linkedlearning.org/Certification).

INTEGRATED PROGRAM OF STUDY	WORK-BASED LEARNING	INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS
<p><b>Student-centered learning connected to postsecondary and industry expectations.</b></p> <p>▼</p> <p><b>Instructional design</b> connects rigorous academics and career-themed coursework.</p> <p><b>Instructional delivery</b> features equitable access to interdisciplinary learning opportunities.</p> <p><b>Students are encouraged to demonstrate their learning</b> in many ways, including an annual public presentation.</p> <p><b>Early college credit opportunities</b> such as dual enrollment are accessible to all students.</p> <p><b>Postsecondary and industry partners</b> inform the design and assess the effectiveness of the program of study.</p> <p><b>Students have the opportunity for shared learning through a cohort structure</b> focused on cross-subject projects and work-based learning experiences related to the pathway theme.</p>	<p><b>A continuum of meaningful experiences with work and real-world applications of learning.</b></p> <p>▼</p> <p><b>Students follow a work-based learning plan</b> that is informed by input from industry partners and tied to the program of study and outcomes defined for their pathway.</p> <p><b>Students successfully complete multiple experiences</b> ranging from career exploration to training and career preparation.</p> <p><b>Students have access to formal work-based learning</b> through internships and apprenticeships, including opportunities to gain industry certificates.</p> <p><b>Students self-assess</b> their work-based learning experiences, connecting these experiences to their academic studies, while also reflecting on their career skills development as well as understanding of their industry of interest.</p> <p><b>Industry partners evaluate</b> the workplace readiness of each student, including the quality of their preparation, performance, and soft skills.</p>	<p><b>Meeting the developmental needs of each young person to equip all for a successful transition to college and career.</b></p> <p>▼</p> <p><b>Students experience</b> learning that emphasizes social awareness, self-management, and a mindset of growth and self-efficacy.</p> <p><b>Teachers and counselors</b> monitor student academic, personal, and social-emotional needs and provide culturally responsive, timely supports, engaging families in student development plans as warranted.</p> <p><b>Students learn in a culture of high expectations</b>, are introduced to a variety of postsecondary options, and identify individual college and career readiness goals.</p> <p><b>Students receive guidance</b> to complete college entry tests, financial aid applications, and other requirements for accessing postsecondary education.</p> <p><b>Students gain job application skills</b> and resources they need to be prepared to enter the workplace, apprenticeships, and certification programs.</p>

## SUBMISSION DEADLINES

There are no submission deadlines for certification review. The Linked Learning Alliance will review submissions for Silver certification on a rolling basis. The full Gold certification process takes approximately 10–13 weeks from submission to certification. Reviews are scheduled in the order they are received, and dependent upon the availability of lead reviewers.

## APPROXIMATE TIMELINE

Linked Learning Gold certification includes several key milestones. This timeline is intended as a guide for planning purposes. The time frames it notes are not mandated and will be influenced by internal pathway schedules and preparation needs, review leader availability, and review feedback during the process. The final timeline will be determined collaboratively between the review leader, the pathway site and district leads, and the Linked Learning Alliance. Steps, support tools, and outputs for this process are described in this guide.



## PREPARATION

### DETERMINE PATHWAY READINESS

Linked Learning Certification is designed to support a process of continuous improvement toward positive college and career outcomes for all students. Silver certification is the first level in the certification process, and a prerequisite to Gold certification. Silver certification signifies that the foundational structures of a high-quality pathway are in place. Review Silver documentation and update your data and artifacts if needed to reflect your current program.

### FORM A CERTIFICATION TEAM

The foundation of a high-quality pathway and successful Gold certification is a strong team of pathway CTE and core academic teachers, site and district administrators, parents and students, and industry and postsecondary partners. Team members work together and have a common understanding of their roles in the pathway, and in the certification process.

### ENGAGE IN SELF-STUDY

*Approximate duration: two weeks*

Linked Learning offers a promising set of strategies to ensure that every student has what they need to graduate from high school ready for college and prepared to fully participate in the economy and civic life. To produce desired outcomes, Linked Learning pathways must be implemented with high quality and offer every student equitable access to the core components. Pathways conduct self-study, benchmarked against Gold standards for quality and equity, in order to continually improve their practice and results. Using the [self-study guide](#), your pathway team can assess the degree to which your pathway is holistically meeting or exceeding the Gold standards.

---

*“In going for Gold, we were able to accomplish many important goals which have benefited our students and our academy. We appreciated having a target to work toward. It helped us bring all of our efforts into focus.”*

LINKED LEARNING GOLD PATHWAY PRACTITIONER

## EXECUTION

### EXPRESS INTENT TO PROCEED

Based on your team's assessment of pathway readiness, determine whether you are ready to proceed with certification or plan to work on areas needing improvement. Once you have determined that you are ready to move forward, notify the certification team at the Linked Learning Alliance by indicating your intentions to begin via the certification platform.

The fee for Gold certification is \$2,395 per pathway. Fees are due prior to assignment of a lead reviewer.

### COLLABORATE WITH A REVIEW LEADER

Once you have formally expressed your intent to proceed, it is time to meet with the Linked Learning Alliance assigned Gold certification review leader. This person will work collaboratively with your designated team leaders for your site and district to determine a timeline, review the process, establish communication norms, and review artifact collection processes and expectations. Review leaders are experienced practitioners in the Linked Learning field who have been trained to provide consistent guidance and evaluation with fidelity to the Linked Learning Gold standards.

### COLLECT ARTIFACTS

*Approximate duration: three to four weeks*

The collection of artifacts aligned to Gold standards becomes a repository for the team of best practices, reflections from all stakeholders, and data that offer a holistic view and record of the high-quality work being accomplished by the pathway. Pathways will use the certification platform pages to organize and upload their artifacts and data.

## CONFIRMATION

### PARTICIPATE IN PRELIMINARY REVIEW

The preliminary review is a virtual meeting in which pathway site and district leaders and the review leader discuss the pathway artifacts collected and collaboratively assess pathway performance against the Gold standards.

Prior to meeting, your pathway team should review their artifacts using the provided preliminary review template to assess readiness for the review.

As part of the review, any standards in need of further attention will be identified for your team to address prior to the site visit. Aspects of the pathway program that your team has prioritized for the site visit will be identified. Collected data will also be reviewed. The review will be structured in alignment with the preliminary review template that the pathway team has used to prepare for this session. Within one week, the review leader will return the completed template to the pathway team with recommendations and commendations.

---

*“The biggest benefit was the opportunity to critically assess our program. There were several elements we had and knew we did, but they were not formalized. This process allowed us to look at ways to formalize these processes and keep the program growing for our students.”*

LINKED LEARNING GOLD PATHWAY PRACTITIONER

## CONFIRMATION (CONTINUED)

### PREPARE FOR SITE VISIT

When your pathway is ready to proceed with a site visit, the review leader will work with pathway, site, and district leaders to establish dates and a schedule for the visit. Prior to the site visit, the review leader will consult with pathway team leaders to determine the standards on which they intend to focus during the visit.

Typically, the site visit lasts approximately five hours and involves the review leader, a Linked Learning Certification team member, and at least one site or district leader. At times, additional reviewers, peer reviewers from partner districts, or observers may participate in the site visit. Observers may be lead teachers or administrators from other Linked Learning schools and districts who are eager to better understand the review process in order to inform their own preparation, or they may be Linked Learning Alliance staff, coaches, or community partners. Their role is to observe, not to contribute to, the assessments made by review team members. Decisions on who will participate in the site visit will be made in collaboration with the pathway leads.

The site visit includes stops in classrooms, focus groups, interviews, and review of additional artifacts as needed for certification. Based on the results of the preliminary review and the areas identified for further observation or deeper understanding, the review lead may request interviews with specific individuals, focus groups with specific stakeholders, and/or observation of specific classes. Logistical considerations, sample schedules, and sample focus group questions will be available in the provided site visit resources. In light of COVID-19, in-person site visits have been suspended and have shifted to a virtual format.

---

*“At the start of the process the unanticipated benefits were the credibility certification gave our requests for district or site support... The definition of an excellent program provided by the Linked Learning Alliance allowed us to get reforms much faster and further than I thought possible.”*

LINKED LEARNING GOLD PATHWAY PRACTITIONER

## CONFIRMATION (CONTINUED)

### HOST SITE VISIT

The site visit provides the opportunity for an external reviewer to validate your pathway's quality and gather both the district and pathway team feedback. We recommend that your pathway lead takes part in the site visit. Your district and/or site administrator is also encouraged to participate. The review leader will strive to set a tone consistent with the goals of continuous learning and improvement.

At the end of the site visit, the review team will meet with site/district leaders to draft an initial set of commendations and recommendations. Please allow for at least 75 minutes for this discussion. Afterward, all community members are welcome and encouraged to participate in an approximately 20-minute debrief at the end of the day.

If the team is able to validate that the pathway meets the Linked Learning Gold standards, then the pathway will be recommended for Linked Learning Gold certification. Gold certification is a significant accomplishment and a milestone worth celebrating. At the same time, certification is not intended to be the end of the Linked Learning journey, but rather a snapshot at a point in time that informs a continuous learning and improvement cycle.

---

*“For both us and our students, we had an opportunity to really consider what we have been doing as a pathway and where our next steps should take us. Our students felt a sense of connectedness within the process—which will most certainly help them in their future endeavors. The process challenged us to organize our work in such a way that it became valuable not only to the pathway, but to the school as a whole.”*

LINKED LEARNING GOLD PATHWAY PRACTITIONER

## CONFIRMATION (CONTINUED)

### REVIEW FINAL REPORT

Following the site visit, the review leader will draft a report and share it with a member of the Linked Learning Alliance review team for comment and editing. Then, within approximately two weeks from the time of the site visit, the pathway lead, along with site and district administrators, will receive this report from the review leader. The members of your pathway review team are requested to check the findings for factual accuracy. With your input, the draft is finalized and a cover letter is crafted to accompany it. The report will be available within the certification platform.

The final report will contain commendations and recommendations that inform continuous learning and improvement regardless of the certification decision. It is intended to recognize and celebrate the efforts of the pathway team, your site and district leaders, and your community partners to develop a high-quality pathway that prepares students for success in college, career, and life. It is also intended to recommend areas for growth.

If the pathway has demonstrated some areas of “exemplary practice,” these areas will be highlighted in the final report, and Linked Learning Alliance staff may request to post some of the associated evidence on the Alliance website as examples of promising practices.

Certification is based on a holistic approach. If a pathway is recommended for certification, but is not meeting some specific standards, the team may be asked to provide a narrative update and additional artifacts in one or two years’ time to maintain their Gold certification status. Gold certification is valid for four years.

If a pathway is not recommended for certification, the review lead and Linked Learning Alliance staff will work with the pathway team to develop a narrow scope of recommendations for improvement and a timeline for implementation and follow-up review. Gold certification may be conferred at the completion of the review, which may be virtual or onsite as determined by the review lead in consultation with Linked Learning Alliance staff and site and district leaders.



**Linked Learning** is a systemic approach to education dedicated to the idea that students work harder and dream bigger when their learning connects with them and connects them to the world. Linked Learning gives students the supports they need to prepare for college and career, and helps them grow through real work experiences so they can fully participate in shaping civic, cultural, and economic life. Proven in California and spreading across the United States, this approach works because it is built on relevance, equity, and hope.

**The Linked Learning Alliance** is a devoted partner in the work of transforming education. Established in 2008, the Alliance ensures that the Linked Learning approach not only grows, but flourishes in every school it touches. Optimistic in mission and surefooted in means, the Alliance works as a standard setter, communicator, field driver, and advocate so that every district can pursue the highest quality of learning. Supporting the champions of the Linked Learning approach, the Alliance renews hope in education by empowering every school, every employer, and every community to prepare students for success by bringing learning to life.

Learn more at [LinkedLearning.org](https://www.linkedlearning.org)