



Linked Learning Gold Certification High School Review Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Linked Learning standards and certification are based on the belief that all students deserve highly engaging, hands-on learning experiences that help them understand the relevance of their education, prepare them academically for further learning, and help them see the connection between education and their future career paths.

Linked Learning Gold Certification indicates that the leaders of a learning pathway are committed to delivering high-quality experiences that benefit pathway students and community. It also demonstrates that they are contributing to the development of a stronger Linked Learning field and celebrated for the steps they are taking to ensure students are ready for further learning and careers. Gold Certification is available to qualified high schools and middle schools.

Designed expressly for use by high school educators and administrators, the principles and practices embedded in the [Linked Learning Gold Certification High School Standards](#) provide a framework for equity and, ultimately, achieving successful college and career outcomes. Linked Learning high school pathways are aligned to the rigorous academic expectations of a college prep curriculum to set the stage for postsecondary success.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide provides educators with an understanding of the evaluation and certification process and the role of the reviewers in that process. The evaluation is best understood as part of a continuous improvement process that also provides site and district decision makers with useful information about areas of strength and recommendations for improvement.

In the following pages, key steps on the pathway certification process are defined to support expectation setting and planning.

Questions? Suggestions?

Contact the Linked Learning Alliance,
certification@linkedlearning.org



CERTIFICATION PLATFORM TIPS

- Certification or pathway lead can use the “Team” tab on the “Pathway” page to ensure everyone on the pathway team has access to the platform.
- District staff can access the platform to verify that district comparison data is entered and represents the most recently completed academic year. They may also collaborate with the pathway team and find contact information for the Lead Reviewer.
- When entering data or narratives, don’t forget to click on “SAVE” after every entry and before navigating away from the page. Work will only be saved after you click on the “SAVE” button and will otherwise be lost.
- For the data pages, reviewers will not be able to start their review until the pathway or certification lead has filled in all data fields AND clicked on the “Submit” button at the top of any data page. All data fields must be filled in before submitting. If you do not have data for a particular field, select “N/A or did not collect” and explain.
- On the artifacts pages, reviewers will not be able to start the review until the pathway or certification lead has marked all domains “Complete.” The progress bar at the top of any page will display the number of domains marked complete. Once all are complete the progress bar will change to a “Submit” button. You must click on the “Submit” button to allow reviewers to begin the review. This should be done at least ten days prior to the Preliminary Review meeting.
- The pathway team will no longer be able to edit the review until after the preliminary review meeting. At that point, the team will be able to see reviewers’ responses and edit or amend the review as needed.

INITIAL CONTACT WITH PATHWAY TEAM

An independent lead reviewer will be selected to do the following:

- Build a collaborative relationship with the pathway lead or team and support them through the certification process
- Lead a preliminary review of submitted artifacts and data and provide feedback to the pathway
- Lead a site visit in consultation with the pathway lead and other key stakeholders
- Make a certification recommendation to the Linked Learning Alliance
- Draft and complete a final report in collaboration with the Linked Learning Alliance

The process begins when the lead reviewer reaches out to the pathway lead to set up a 30-minute introductory online meeting with pathway team. Meeting objectives include:

- Provide introductions and describe roles, including that of lead reviewer
- Agree on method of communications and expectations, including that lead reviewer is expected to respond to communications from pathway lead(s) within 48 hours
- Access and use of the certification platform
- Sketch out timeline:
 - ~12 weeks is a good estimate to start with (from initial meeting to final recommendation). This allows approximately six weeks to gather artifacts, write narratives and prepare for the preliminary review using the certification platform.
 - Following the outcome of the review, the pathway has another 4–6 weeks to work on any revisions/additions identified in the preliminary review and prepare for the site visit. It is a fluid process!
 - You may need more or less time depending on how much time your team has spent preparing prior to beginning the process. A final timeline must be approved by the review team.
- Discuss Q&A

Coming out of this session, the lead reviewer shares a summary of the meeting with the Linked Learning Alliance and pathway team.

PRELIMINARY REVIEW PROCESS

SELECTING AND SUBMITTING EVIDENCE FOR PRELIMINARY REVIEW

Pathway teams should select ***no more than a few key pieces of evidence*** for each of the standards. Some pieces of evidence may support more than one standard. Less is more; focus on high leverage pieces of evidence. District and pathway teams should also provide data related to outcomes as described in the standards.

To formally submit this evidence for review, the certification or pathway lead uploads data and artifacts to the certification platform **a minimum of 10 days prior to the preliminary review** (or according to other timing established in agreement with the lead reviewer).

In the platform, mark each domain complete using the toggle button. When all domains are marked complete, a “submit” button will appear on the top righthand portion of the screen. You must click on the submit button in order to make the submission visible to the reviewer. Once submitted, the pathway team will no longer be able to edit the submission. The review will reopen and the team will have the opportunity to revise and respond once they have received feedback from the review team following the preliminary review.

REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Identify who will take part in the preliminary review. Participants should include, at minimum:

- Lead reviewer
- Linked Learning Alliance reviewer
- Pathway lead(s), coach, or site/district administrators
- Other pathway team members (optional, based on their knowledge of the artifacts and narratives provided)

REVIEW EXPERIENCE

- The preliminary review is a 90-minute online meeting. The pathway team will be asked to walk the review team through each strand and domain describing the pathway program and providing context to the artifacts and data and how they demonstrate meeting each of the standards in the domain. Pathway teams should be prepared to discuss pathway data for each domain. The review team may ask clarifying questions of the pathway regarding their data and artifacts. This is an opportunity to identify any gaps that need to be addressed prior to the site visit. In addition, the reviewers will identify key questions or focus areas for the site visit.

- By the conclusion of the preliminary review, the review team shall be prepared to share their preliminary assessment on each strand. The team should also identify tentative commendations and recommendations for each of the domains that will be used in the final report.
- These initial ratings for the standards and domain are tentative and need to be verified during the site visit. The final report and recommendations for certification will be done by the lead reviewer and submitted after the site visit to the Linked Learning Alliance through the reviewer portal. The Alliance will make the final determination regarding certification.
- Within five days of the preliminary review, the lead reviewer should provide the pathway team any feedback, questions or clarifications using the reviewer portal.

DRAFT AGENDA FOR THE PRELIMINARY REVIEW

Sample Agenda	
1. Introductions and agenda	5 min
2. Integrated program of study	15–20 min presentation, 5–10 min Q&A
3. Work-based learning	15–20 min presentation, 5–10 min Q&A
4. Integrated student supports	15–20 min presentation, 5–10 min Q&A
5. Debrief and conclusion	5 min

SITE VISIT

The site visit is an opportunity for an external reviewer to validate a pathway's quality and provide feedback to both the district and pathway team. Once the review team validates that the pathway meets the Linked Learning Gold Standards, then the pathway will be recommended for Linked Learning Gold Certification. While the evaluation is not the end of the road, it does represent a significant accomplishment of a milestone that is worth celebrating.

Based on any areas of further inquiry or examination, the lead reviewer and the district/site leader working with the pathway lead/director develop the visit schedule. This schedule typically combines an opening presentation by the pathway and key stakeholders, as well as classroom visits, interviews, focus groups, and other meetings. Classroom visits should be focused on highlighting particular practices or standards of the pathway related to the Linked Learning Gold Standards.

While the pathway team and site and district leaders may be inclined to interpret the visit as a form of compliance, the lead reviewer should do their best to set a tone consistent with the ultimate goal of continuous improvement. That is to say, while Linked Learning Gold Certification is an important result for all involved and while the in-depth examination of pathway quality results in commendations and recommendations in the final report, everything surfaced through this process can and should inform continuous improvement, regardless of the certification decision.

Under the supervision of the Linked Learning Alliance, lead reviewers actively support pathway teams or pathways lead teachers prior to, during, and after the site-visit by completing the following tasks.

PRIOR TO THE VISIT

- The lead reviewer will keep communication channels open and regularly check in with the pathway lead to answer questions and make the process as collaborative as possible.
- The lead reviewer will review pathway's submitted data, artifacts, and narratives in full.
- At least three weeks before the site visit, the lead reviewer works with the pathway lead to jointly develop the site visit schedule to ensure that it meets mutual needs. This includes identifying any observers who will be part of the site visit and clarifying their roles. The student and faculty focus group sessions should take place in person on the day of the site visit. The advisory board/industry partner focus group may be virtual and scheduled on a different day. It is strongly encouraged that this be in conjunction with an advisory board meeting, providing the review team with an authentic experience of industry partner-pathway structures and relationships. The parent focus group may also be virtual and scheduled on a day and time fostering the greatest level of participation.
- See appendices at the end of this guide for sample site visit schedules and specific guidance for the focus groups.

- At least two weeks prior to the site visit, upload draft site visit schedule and agenda to the Linked Learning Alliance certification portal.

DURING THE SITE VISIT

- The pathway will provide an overview presentation of their learning and work related to Linked Learning standards. This should include sharing their history, key successes, and what they are still working on. During the overview, the pathway should “tell their story” and explain *key evidence and data* (not all evidence! This is a holistic overview) related to the Gold standards. This is an opportunity for students, community members, and other key partners to take part in sharing their experiences and the impact of the pathway.
- The review team will conduct classroom visits and meet with pathway constituencies as defined in the Focus Group Guidance document (Appendix B).
- At the end of the site visit the lead reviewer will identify any additional questions or evidence that is needed before submitting the final report.

FINAL REPORT

Certification takes a holistic approach to reviewing pathway quality based on an examination of artifacts, on-site review of program, and examination of pathway data. In their reports, reviewers may identify individual standards within domains as needing improvement. These areas should be called out in the final report and used to form the basis of the two-year mid-cycle check-in.

If a pathway is not recommended for certification, the final report will clearly identify the strand(s) and domains that are below standard, reasons why the pathway is falling short, and recommendations for improvement tied to specific domains. In the final meeting of the site visit with the pathway team, a draft timeframe for addressing deficient areas should be agreed upon and recorded in the final report.

The Linked Learning Alliance will use the final report to work with the pathway team over the period established and will conduct a final review. The form of the final review will be determined by the Alliance in consultation with the pathway team.

The lead reviewer has ten days after the site visit to submit their recommendation to the Linked Learning Alliance, after which the Alliance will inform the pathway and district of certification in writing and will work with the pathway and district to celebrate and publicly recognize Linked Learning Gold Certification.



APPENDIX A: SITE VISIT GUIDANCE AND SAMPLE AGENDA

This sample is provided for demonstration purposes. Your actual agenda should reflect the character and culture of your community. For example, the start time and end times may vary depending on your school day. You may schedule faculty focus groups around their availability. The agenda should minimize the impact on daily routines and schedules and should not require substitute teachers with the possible exception of the pathway lead. The pathway team creates a draft agenda for approval by the lead reviewer.

DAY 1: (INSERT DATE)

Time	Period	Objective	Room #
8:30 a.m. – 9:20 a.m. (50 min)	Period 1	Opening Presentation and Leadership meeting Overview of pathway and site visit agenda	(Insert room #)
9:30 p.m. – 10:30 p.m. (60 min)	Period 2	Classroom Visits 9th-grade CTE class You and the Law 10th-grade CTE class 11th-12th-grade CTE class	(Insert room #) (Insert room #) (Insert room #) (Insert room #)
10:40 a.m. – 11:20 a.m. (40min)	Period 3	Focus Group – Pathway staff (9th and 10th-grade team)	(Insert room #)
11:20 p.m. – 12:00 p.m. (40 min)	Period 4	Focus Group – Pathway faculty/ staff lunch provided	(Insert room #)
12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m. (30 min)	Lunch	Focus Group – Students	(Insert room #)
12:40 p.m. – 1:20 p.m. (40 min)	Period 5	Review team meeting with pathway, school, and district leadership	
1:40 p.m. – 2:25 p.m. (45 min)	Period 6	Classroom Visits 9th-grade English class 11 th grade English class 10th-grade math class	(Insert room #) (Insert room #) (Insert room #) (Insert room #)
2:30 p.m. – 2:50 p.m. (20 min)	After school	Review team meeting	(Insert room #)
2:55 p.m. – 3:20 p.m. (25 min)	After school	Discussion and debriefing with key staff (Refreshments will be provided)	(Insert room #)

Date/Time	Purpose	Online Access
Thurs. xx/xx 5:00 – 5:45	Parent Panel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name x Name x Name x Name x 	https://zoom.us/principal
Wed. xx/xx 5:45 – 6:45	Advisory Board Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name x Name x Name x Name x 	https://zoom.us/principal

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP GUIDANCE

This page outlines the focus groups that are required for the Linked Learning Gold Certification site visit. These focus groups will provide the visiting evaluations team with a better understanding of partner involvement and pathway impact on the students and the community. Provided with this document is a series of focus group questions that the pathway may share with focus group participants in advance of the site visit to give participants adequate time to help them prepare for a thoughtful and thorough discussion.

LEADERSHIP TEAM FOCUS GROUP – 40 MINUTES

The leadership team includes the pathway lead, district Linked Learning representatives, site principal, and other site administrators or counselors considered part of the leadership team.

Introductions and Overview

1. Overview of the pathway.
2. What do you feel are the one or two greatest strengths of this pathway?
3. What do you feel are the one or two key items that we should be looking at related to improvement/clarification during the site visit?

Integrated Program of Study

1. **Early College Credit Opportunities:** What types of early college credit opportunities or advanced placement courses are available to students? What percentage of students participate in these courses? What percentage earns college credit?
2. **Integrated Program of Study:** How does the leadership team support and promote cross-subject project-based learning in the program of study?
3. **College Qualifying:** How is the district, site, or pathway collecting evidence of students achieving one or more of the following: enrolling in a postsecondary institution, attaining an industry-recognized certificate, entering into an apprenticeship program, or obtaining a job?
4. **Social Emotional Learning:** How does the pathway address the development of social awareness, self-management, and a mindset of growth and self-efficacy?

Work-Based Learning

1. Please describe how your work-based learning continuum of opportunities (career exploration, awareness, and preparation) and key outcomes of your work-based learning program.
2. Do students have work-based learning plans, and do they participate in self- assessments?
3. **Work-based Learning Plan and Student Assessment:** How do you assess the impact of work-based learning activities?

4. **Employer/Provider Evaluation:** How do industry and employers provide input and feedback about work-based learning?

Student Supports

1. What types of student orientation activities take place that prepare them for pathway success?
As appropriate, these activities occur yearly to ensure preparation for success at each grade level.
2. **Equitable Enrollment:** What are the student demographics of the pathway?
3. **Student Validation:** How is student feedback collected and how is it applied to the design and improvement of the pathway?

PATHWAY PARTNERS FOCUS GROUP – 30-40 MINUTES

The pathway partner focus group should include at least one advisory board member, work-based learning partners, and, if possible, representation from postsecondary partners and other relevant community partners.

Introduction

1. Please introduce yourself and tell us about your professional work—where you work and what you do.
2. What has been your involvement with this pathway and for how long?
3. Has anyone worked within a classroom for a teacher-created project?
4. Has anyone ever assessed a student's work?
5. As a parent, how would you describe the pathway experience for your child?
6. What do you see from the students?

Work-Based Learning Assessment, Professionalism, and Workplace Readiness

1. How do you think your work at this pathway has impacted students? How could it be more impactful for you and students?
2. **Employer/Provider Validation:** Quality work-based learning includes opportunities for thoughtful self-reflection and feedback from providers. How do providers assess, reflect, and give feedback related to the WBL experiences they are engaged in directly or support?
 - How do partners assess the quality of student preparation and performance in work-based learning and related activities (e.g., professionalism, soft skills, etc.)?
 - How is this feedback used to improve preparation of students for work-based learning and employment?
3. Have you been involved in any of the pathways curriculum, projects, or looking at student work?
4. What do you feel are the strengths of the pathway?

Advisory Board

1. Are you a member of the Advisory Board?
2. How has the advisory board supported the pathway and student outcomes related to college or career readiness? (only if they are part of the Advisory board or know of its work)

PARENT/GUARDIAN FOCUS GROUP – 30-40 MINUTES

The parents participating should reflect the diversity of families you serve. Every effort should be made to include parents of EL students, students with IEPs, and students of the lower and upper grades. A translator should be made available as needed.

1. What grade is your child in and how long have they been in this pathway?
2. What is your child's favorite thing about the pathway? What do you value most in your child's pathway experience?
3. How do the school and individual teachers communicate with you? Do you feel that you have a good understanding of the academic expectations for your child?
4. Does your child feel safe and supported at school?
5. Are you aware of the options open you to and your child in selecting college and/or a career path after graduation?
6. Are the connections between school and work clear? What kind of experiences has your child had?

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP – 30-40 MINUTES

The student focus group should include pathway students from each grade level and represent the diverse student body of the pathway. Every effort should be made to include ELL and students with IEPs and, if possible, a graduate of the pathway. Students should be prepared to speak about their pathway experience including how they were recruited, pathway culture, coursework, culminating experience, and work-based learning opportunities. The group should include between six and 10 students. Half may be pre-selected by the pathway team. The review team should be given the opportunity to select the remainder during classroom visits. Therefore, the student panel should take place no earlier than following the first round of classroom visits.

Introduction and Goals

1. Can you please tell us your name, what grade you are in, and how long you have been in this pathway?
2. How has the pathway prepared you for college and career?

Integrated Program of Study

1. ***Culminating Experience:*** Can you talk about an integrated project you did this past year? Have you participated or do you plan to complete an internship project, capstone project, or defense of learning?
2. How often is the pathway theme integrated into your core academic classes?
3. How are teaching and learning different in the pathway?

Work-Based Learning

1. How is work-based learning a part of the pathway?
2. ***Internship Completion:*** Have you participated in an internship?
3. How do you get feedback about your work-based learning?

Student Support

1. ***Equitable Enrollment and Admissions:*** Did you pick this pathway or were you assigned? If you picked it what made you choose it?
2. What types of student orientation activities take place that prepare students for pathway success? Do these occur yearly at each grade level?
3. ***Support Plan for Equitable Success:*** How would you describe the culture of your pathway? How you are supported at your school? Who do you go to when you have problems or questions?
4. How do you find out about college and careers?

Pathway Improvement

1. If you were going to tell an eighth grader that they should come to this pathway what would be the best reason you would share?
2. If you could improve something about your pathway experience, what would it be and why?

FACULTY/STAFF FOCUS GROUP – 40 MINUTES

The faculty focus group will include pathway teachers and any other relevant counselors or school/district staff who contribute to the success of the pathway. The group must include teachers from across the core subject areas and CTE/career themes classes.

Introduction

1. Please introduce yourself and tell us about your role.
2. What is a key strength of the pathway/academy?

Integrated Program of Study

1. How does the pathway integrate curriculum and how do academic courses integrate the pathway theme?
2. ***Social Emotional Learning***: What activities do students participate in that emphasize the development of social awareness, self-management, and a mindset of growth and self-efficacy?
3. ***Equitable Enrollment and Admissions***: How are students selected and placed in the pathway?
4. ***Culminating Experience***: Can you describe your culminating project or portfolio that students do senior year?
5. ***Early College Credit Opportunities***: What types of early college credit opportunities or advanced placement courses are available to students? What percent of students take these courses? What percent earn college credit?

Work-Based Learning

1. ***Work-Based Learning Plan***: Please describe your work-based learning continuum of opportunities and outcomes. What percent of students take part in these activities?
2. ***Work-Based Learning Assessment***: How do you assess the impact of work-based learning activities?
3. ***Employer/Partner Validation***: How do industry and employers provide input and feedback about work-based learning?

Support Services

1. What types of student orientation activities take place that prepare them for pathway success? As appropriate, these activities occur yearly to ensure preparation for success at each grade level.
2. ***Student Validation***: How is student feedback collected and how is it applied to the design and improvement of the pathway? (1) Supporting evidence could include student surveys/focus group findings, or other means by which the pathway gets regular feedback or learns from its partners—and how the pathway acts on that feedback. (2) Students complete an annual survey.



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 serves the coalition of educators, employers, and community organizations dedicated to advancing equity and excellence through Linked Learning. The Alliance provides a collective voice for this field, advocates for policies that support the Linked Learning approach, sets the quality standard for Linked Learning in practice, and brings diverse stakeholders together to improve outcomes for students.

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