

TO: Linked Learning Pathways, Districts, and Partners
FROM: The Linked Learning Pathway Certification Design Team
RE: **Revised Certification Criteria for Linked Learning Pathways**
DATE: October 3, 2011

We are pleased to share the revised Certification Criteria for Linked Learning Pathways.

The first pilot year for Linked Learning Certification was very successful. The 39 original Linked Learning quality criteria and the associated pathway quality review process served their intent well. The *Certification Criteria for Linked Learning Pathways* were used by pathway communities of practice to self-assess the fidelity and quality of their pathways and identify specific areas for pathway improvement to attain the over-arching goal of improving student outcomes. We have now completed 23 pathway quality reviews at 18 high schools in 9 different school districts. As a result, 19 pathways were certified and 4 were found to be “in progress.” The pilot will continue through the 2011–12 school year.

Just as we expect pathways to continually self-assess their progress and the pathway’s impact on student outcomes, we knew from the beginning that the certification criteria, and the associated process and tools, must also be subject to a continuous improvement process. Throughout this pilot year, we collected recommendations from pathway leaders, district directors, coaches, and pathway review team members about ways to improve the certification criteria and process.

In June, these recommendations were consolidated and brought to the Linked Learning Pathway Certification Design Team, which is comprised of representatives from the five organizations endorsing the *Certification Criteria for Linked Learning Pathways* (the Career Academy Support Network, ConnectEd: The California Center for College and Career, Education Trust-West, the National Academy Foundation, and the National Career Academy Coalition), as well as other partners and school district representatives. Based on recommendations, members of the Design Team worked through the summer to revise the certification criteria. In doing so, we had four primary objectives:

- To better align the criteria with our work over the past year on pathway **student learning outcomes** (e.g., 1.1.3, 2.6.2, 4.2.2);
- To better capture the importance of issues of **equity, access, and choice** (e.g., 1.1.4, 2.1.1, 3.1.1, 4.2.1);
- To better emphasize the importance of **high-quality instruction** (e.g., 2.1.1, 2.5.1, 2.5.2); and
- To better describe the utilization of data to demonstrate **improvement in student outcomes/achievement** as a primary objective of pathways and an indicator of their quality (e.g., 4.1.2, 4.2.3).

As we began to revise the criteria, we knew that the revisions might cause some degree of anxiety among pathway teams that had already begun working with the original set of criteria. Many revisions to the criteria incorporate more descriptive language in order to improve clarity and/or focus and make

explicit what was already implicit in the original criteria. A few of the criteria have changed more substantially. And, one criterion was added (1.1.2 Student Learning Outcomes). To help pathway teams internalize the revisions and use them in preparation for pathway quality reviews this year, we have attached a side-by-side comparison of original vs. revised criteria language.

We had hoped to complete the revisions and distribute the updated criteria by the end of August. We apologize for not meeting that target date. We were committed to ensuring that the revision process was undertaken with the same collaborative spirit with which the original criteria were developed; we greatly value the input and expertise of all endorsing partners and we wanted to ensure that the certification criteria continue to be a relevant document that serves the broader field. We hope you agree that the delay was worth it, as the result represents a high-quality product that has broad endorsement.

The enclosed *Certification Criteria for Linked Learning Pathways*, dated [October 2011](#), replaces the original criteria document dated April 2010. We recommend that you dispose of all copies of the older document to avoid confusion.

We are in the process of updating documents and tools that support the pathway quality review process so that they align with the revised criteria and respond to feedback from partners. Specifically, we are in the process of updating the glossary to reflect language in the revised criteria. Similarly, we are updating the certification guide (rubric, examples of evidence, etc.) and the online digital certification tool to align to the revised criteria. You should expect to receive these revised documents and tools by October 21st, along with information about some new tools in development and how to schedule your pathways for certification this year.

Later in fall, the Linked Learning partners will arrange a webinar to review revisions to the criteria and process and respond to your questions. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact Arlene LaPlante, at (619) 993-4844 or alaplante@ConnectEdCalifornia.org.