

CraftED Curriculum

Designing Workforce-Ready Pathways

A Playbook for School Leaders

A practical, field-tested guide for designing project-based diploma pathways, special tracks, and workforce readiness programs.

Drawn from the design and launch of a pioneering
Diploma in Entrepreneurial Studies at a TK–12 independent school.

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1. Introduction & Why This Matters

Schools are increasingly expected to prepare students not only for college, but for a rapidly changing workforce that values adaptability, problem-solving, collaboration, and entrepreneurial thinking. Traditional transcripts alone often fall short of signaling these capabilities to colleges, employers, and students themselves.

Project-based diploma pathways, special tracks, and workforce readiness programs offer a powerful response. When designed well, they:

- Give students authentic opportunities to develop and demonstrate real-world competencies
- Create clearer signaling of student readiness through structured experiences and evidence
- Align academic coursework with co-curricular, internship, and community-based learning
- Build internal coherence across departments while remaining flexible enough for personalized student journeys

This playbook draws from the design and launch of a first-of-its-kind Diploma in Entrepreneurial Studies at a TK–12 independent school. It offers a practical, field-tested roadmap that other schools can adapt for entrepreneurial, innovation, CTE, or broader workforce-readiness pathways.

2. Case Study Snapshot

Program: Diploma in Entrepreneurial Studies (an entrepreneurial / innovation-style pathway)

Context: Designed and launched on an aggressive timeline following a major endowment gift that supported the creation of a pioneering K–12 entrepreneurship diploma.

The Challenge

Create a comprehensive, distinctive diploma pathway that integrated design thinking, business fundamentals, real-world experience, and existing innovation programming — while engaging students, families, faculty, alumni, and community partners.

The Approach

A single designer/project lead built the full program infrastructure from the ground up, including:

- Vision, mission, purpose, and goals
- Diploma requirements and entry points
- Student competency framework
- Personalized pathway maps
- Phased implementation timeline
- Branding, messaging, and stakeholder materials
- Foundations for an internship and mentorship network

Key Outcomes

A launch-ready diploma with clear academic and co-curricular requirements, personalized pathways, and a growing real-world learning ecosystem. The program strengthened the school's position as an innovator in K–12 entrepreneurial education while equipping students with mindsets and experiences that transfer to college

and careers.

3. Foundational Framework: Mission, Purpose & Goals

Mission

The Diploma in Entrepreneurial Studies inspires and equips students to become future-ready innovators and entrepreneurs by combining design thinking, business fundamentals, and real-world experience. Through academic and co-curricular opportunities, students develop the mindsets, skills, and leadership qualities to create meaningful ventures and solve real problems.

Purpose

To promote within students their ability to develop the competencies, skills, and dispositions to become successful entrepreneurs.

Goals

1. Cultivate and practice an entrepreneurial mindset
2. Learn and apply business fundamentals and skills
3. Develop leadership, collaboration, and communication skills
4. Utilize design thinking to develop innovative solutions

These four goals served as the north star for every design decision — from course requirements to co-curricular options to assessment of student growth.

4. The Competency Model

A strong workforce-readiness pathway needs a clear competency framework that defines what students should know and be able to do. In this case study, the school used an **IDEAS** structure (Innovation, Design, Entrepreneurship, Analytics, Sustainability) as the organizing backbone.

Each letter was mapped to a primary competency, supporting subskills, existing curriculum offerings, and potential new courses. The model was designed to work both for the diploma pathway and as a broader departmental framework.

I – Innovation

Primary Competency: Ideation & Innovation

Key Subskills: Creativity, Divergent Thinking, Risk-taking, Resourcefulness, Prototyping + Iteration

Sample Curriculum Alignments: Robotics, Engineering, Physical Computing, introductory AI courses

D – Design

Primary Competency: Design Thinking (for collaborative impact)

Key Subskills: Communication, Collaboration, Reliability, Conflict Resolution, Feedback Skills

Sample Curriculum Alignments: Architecture, 3D Design/Printing, Design & Entrepreneurship courses

E – Entrepreneurship

Primary Competency: Business Basics / Entrepreneurial Mindset

Key Subskills: Growth Orientation, Adaptability, Self-efficacy, Resilience, Financial Literacy

Sample Curriculum Alignments: Social Entrepreneurship, Financial Analytics, Personal Finance, AP Macro/Micro

A – Analytics

Primary Competency: Inquiry & Application (in innovation)

Key Subskills: Information Literacy, Research Methods, Experimentation, Curiosity

Sample Curriculum Alignments: Computer Science sequences, Python, data/analytics courses, statistics

S – Sustainability

Primary Competency: Designing for Sustainability

Key Subskills: Systems Thinking, Problem-solving, Future Orientation, Resource Management

Sample Curriculum Alignments: Environmental Science/Engineering, sustainability-focused electives

***Design Tip:** Start with 4–6 high-level competencies that feel authentic to your school's identity, then map existing courses and co-curricular experiences underneath them. This creates coherence without requiring a complete curriculum overhaul.*

5. Program Architecture: Requirements & Entry Points

Diploma Requirements (Example Structure – 5 total credits)

Coursework

- Social Entrepreneurship (0.5)
- Financial Analytics (0.5)
- Additional related electives (3.5)
- Advanced Entrepreneurship / Incubator-to-Accelerator course (0.5)

Co-Curricular Requirements

- External internship (minimum 25 hours)
- One additional experience from:
 - Related club (full school year)
 - Industry certification
 - Aligned service or global project
 - Summer college program or project

Entry Points

- **8th graders:** May apply in the spring before 9th grade
- **9th graders:** Strongly encouraged to apply by the end of freshman year for optimal course alignment

- **10th graders:** May apply with demonstrated agency; may need additional external coursework
- **Retroactive credit:** Students can receive credit for prior internships, entrepreneurial clubs, or relevant external experiences

This structure balances academic rigor with flexibility. The relatively light formal credit load makes the pathway accessible while the co-curricular and internship requirements ensure real-world depth.

6. Personalized Student Pathways

One of the most powerful design features is the emphasis on **personalized pathways**. Students are not expected to follow a single rigid sequence. Instead, they build a coherent journey that reflects their interests while still meeting the diploma requirements.

Example approaches that emerged in the design process:

- A student interested in fashion, design, and finance might combine social entrepreneurship, design electives, related clubs, a summer internship, and a senior pitch project.
- A student focused on engineering, 3D printing, and sustainability might layer robotics, environmental courses, industry certifications, makerspace leadership, and a technical senior project.

Advisors and program leads help students map their pathway early, revisit it annually, and identify both existing experiences that can count and strategic next steps.

Design Tip: Create simple visual pathway maps (or a template students can fill out) that show how coursework, clubs, internships, and projects can combine. These become powerful tools for advising, family communication, and student ownership.

7. Implementation Roadmap

A clear, phased timeline helps schools move from vision to launch without losing momentum. The case-study school used a three-phase approach spanning roughly three years.

Phase 1: Planning & Development

- Secure leadership approval and finalize the overall strategy
- Build internal awareness through faculty communications and “what’s new” series
- Explore existing clubs and programs as potential pathway offerings
- Obtain academic course approvals for core entrepreneurship/business courses
- Host community-facing events (e.g., Global Entrepreneurship Week style)
- Begin collaboration with college counseling on how the pathway will appear in applications

Phase 2: Launch & Initial Enrollment

- Launch a dedicated pathway website and host information sessions for students and families
- Open registration and begin personalized pathway planning
- Facilitate student registration for pathway classes
- Host alumni or career networking events to support summer internship opportunities
- Students formally commit to the pathway and develop individualized plans
- Pilot workplace partner programs and early senior project models

- Officially open the pathway (with optional micro-course or incubator offerings)

Phase 3: Program Implementation & Expansion

- First cohort begins formal academic coursework
- Secure remaining course approvals and expand related pathway options
- Continue information sessions and registration for subsequent cohorts
- Award the first pathway recognitions or micro-credentials (if using that model)
- Open additional related pathways and prepare the first full diploma-eligible cohort

Design Tip: Build the timeline backward from your desired first-cohort start date. Identify the non-negotiable approval gates (board, academic council, curriculum committee) early and work those dates first.

8. Building the Ecosystem

A diploma pathway gains real power when it is connected to authentic external experiences. Key ecosystem elements include:

- **Internships** — Minimum-hour external placements that give students workplace exposure
- **Community & Industry Partners** — Local businesses, nonprofits, and alumni who can host interns, serve as mentors, or provide project briefs
- **Alumni Networks** — Career days, informational interviews, and long-term mentorship
- **Clubs & Student Organizations** — Existing groups that can count toward co-curricular requirements
- **Summer Programs & Certifications** — College-based experiences and industry credentials that add depth and external validation
- **Showcases & Pitch Events** — Opportunities for students to present work to authentic audiences

Start by mapping what already exists in your school and community, then intentionally expand the highest-leverage gaps (usually quality internship placements and mentor relationships).

9. Assessment & Evidence of Learning

Competencies only matter if students can demonstrate growth. The recommended approach pairs each competency with possible co-curricular experiences and tangible artifacts, such as:

- Resume and professional correspondence
- Digital portfolio, LinkedIn profile, or infographic
- Video pitch
- Marketing plan or content
- Business Plan / Business Model Canvas
- Spreadsheets and data analysis
- Detailed design-thinking reflection
- Senior project documentation or prototype evidence

Schools can formalize this through a simple portfolio system, advising check-ins, or optional micro-credentials. Even without a formal badging system, the competency language becomes a shared vocabulary for reflection, goal-setting, and recommendation letters.

10. Stakeholder Engagement & Communication

Successful launch requires clear, audience-specific messaging.

Core audiences: Students • Families • Faculty & advisors • Alumni & community partners • College counseling
• Board and senior leadership

Practical tools that worked well

- One-page overviews (mission, goals, requirements)
- Student-facing flyers with entry points and contact information
- Short explainer videos from program leads
- Information sessions timed with course registration
- Internal “what’s new” communications for faculty
- Dedicated website landing page with interest forms for both students and potential partners

Messaging principles

- Emphasize both academic rigor and real-world experience
- Highlight flexibility and personalization
- Make entry points and timelines transparent
- Show how existing student activities can already count

11. Lessons Learned & Recommendations

1. **Start with competencies, not just courses.** A clear framework gives coherence and helps advisors guide students.
2. **Keep formal credit requirements manageable.** Depth comes from co-curricular and internship experiences.
3. **Design for personalization from day one.** Rigid sequences limit participation and student ownership.
4. **Secure approval gates early.** Academic councils and curriculum committees move on their own calendars.
5. **Build the external ecosystem in parallel.** Internships and mentors take longer to develop than internal courses.
6. **Communicate early and often.** Different stakeholders need different levels of detail.
7. **Use what already exists.** Map current clubs, electives, and partnerships before creating new ones.
8. **Plan for multiple entry points.** Late entrants should still have a viable path.
9. **Document everything.** The materials you create for launch become the templates other schools (and future years) will need.
10. **Protect the “why.”** Keep returning to the core goals so the program stays focused on student growth rather than just completion.

12. Templates & Tools

These templates are designed to be copied, adapted, and localized. They reflect the structure and language that proved effective in the case-study design process.

Template A: Mission / Purpose / Goals One-Pager

[School Name] Diploma in [Pathway Name]

Mission

The Diploma in Entrepreneurial Studies inspires and equips students to become future-ready innovators and entrepreneurs by combining design thinking, business fundamentals, and real-world experience. Through academic and co-curricular opportunities, students develop the mindsets, skills, and leadership qualities to create meaningful ventures and solve real problems.

Purpose

Our purpose is to promote within our students their ability to develop the competencies, skills, and dispositions to become successful entrepreneurs.

Goals

1. Cultivate and practice an entrepreneurial mindset
2. Learn and apply business fundamentals and skills
3. Develop leadership, collaboration, and communication skills
4. Utilize design thinking to develop innovative solutions

Contact: [Program lead name and email]

Template B: Diploma Requirements & Entry Points Summary

Coursework / Credits (example total: 5)

- Core Course 1 (e.g., Social Entrepreneurship) – 0.5
- Core Course 2 (e.g., Financial Analytics) – 0.5
- Additional related electives – 3.5
- Advanced / Capstone course (e.g., Incubator to Accelerator) – 0.5

Co-Curricular Requirements

- External internship (minimum 25 hours)
- One additional experience from: Related club (full year) • Industry certification • Aligned global/service project • Summer college program or significant project

Entry Points

- Rising 9th graders: May apply in the spring of 8th grade
- 9th graders: Strongly encouraged to apply by end of freshman year
- 10th graders: May apply with demonstrated agency; may require additional external coursework
- Retroactive credit available for prior relevant experiences

Template C: Competency Framework Table (Simplified for Adaptation)

Domain	Primary Competency	Key Subskills	Sample Alignments
I – Innovation	Ideation & Innovation	Creativity, Divergent Thinking, Risk-taking, Prototyping	Robotics, Engineering, AI intro
D – Design	Design Thinking	Communication, Collaboration, Feedback Skills	Architecture, 3D Design
E – Entrepreneurship	Business Basics / Mindset	Adaptability, Resilience, Financial Literacy	Social Entrepreneurship, Finance
A – Analytics	Inquiry & Application	Research Methods, Experimentation, Curiosity	CS, Data, Statistics
S – Sustainability	Designing for Sustainability	Systems Thinking, Resource Management	Environmental Science

Schools can replace the IDEAS letters with their own framework (school values, Portrait of a Graduate competencies, or CTE pathways).

Template D: Phased Implementation Timeline

Phase 1: Planning & Development (6–12 months before launch)

Secure leadership/board approval • Finalize strategy • Build internal awareness • Map existing assets to competencies • Obtain course approvals • Host early awareness events

Phase 2: Launch & Initial Enrollment (6–9 months)

Launch website & interest forms • Host info sessions • Open registration & pathway planning • Facilitate course registration • Host networking events • Students commit & complete plans • Pilot partners and projects

Phase 3: Full Implementation & Expansion (Year 2+)

First cohort begins coursework • Expand offerings • Continue recruitment cycles • Award first recognitions • Evaluate and refine

Template E: Personalized Pathway Planning Map (Student-Facing)

Student Name: _____ Graduation Year: _____

Primary Interests / Strengths:

Target Pathway Focus:

Create a simple table with columns for Year (9th–12th), Academic Courses, Co-Curricular/Clubs, Internship/External Experience, Projects/Artifacts, and Competencies Strengthened. Leave rows blank for students and advisors to complete together.

Notes / Next Steps: _____

Advisor Signature / Date: _____

Template F: Stakeholder Messaging Framework

Audience	Key Message Focus	Tone	Primary Materials
Students	Opportunity, personalization, real-world experience, college/career edge	Energetic, clear, inviting	Flyer, short video, info session
Families	Rigor + relevance, clear requirements, flexibility, college signaling	Reassuring, professional	One-pager, FAQ, info session
Faculty / Advisors	How it fits existing work, advising role, student benefits	Collaborative, practical	Internal overview, competency map
Alumni / Partners	Opportunity to mentor, host interns, shape future talent	Partnership-oriented	Partner interest form, one-pager
Leadership / Board	Strategic differentiation, student outcomes, manageable implementation	Strategic, concise	Timeline, goals, resource overview

Template G: Simple Artifact / Evidence Checklist

Students can use this to track evidence of growth toward each competency:

- Resume or professional correspondence
- Digital portfolio, LinkedIn profile, or infographic
- Video pitch or presentation
- Marketing plan or content sample
- Business Model Canvas or full business plan
- Spreadsheet / data analysis
- Detailed design-thinking or project reflection
- Internship reflection or supervisor evaluation
- Prototype, product, or project documentation
- Industry certification or external credential

Template H: Interest Form Starters

Student / Family Interest Form

- Name, grade, email
- What interests you most about this pathway?
- Any related courses, clubs, or experiences you have already completed?
- Preferred contact method

Community Partner Interest Form

- Organization name and contact
- Ways you might engage (internship host, mentor, guest speaker, project brief, etc.)
- Preferred timeline or availability
- Brief description of your organization / industry

Suggested First Steps for a New School

1. Convene a small design team (innovation/PBL lead, academic leader, college counseling, a teacher or two).
2. Draft or adapt a competency framework that fits your school's identity.
3. Audit existing courses, clubs, and partnerships against those competencies.
4. Define a lean set of diploma requirements and entry points.
5. Build a realistic 18–24 month implementation timeline.

6. Create a one-page overview and begin stakeholder conversations.

This playbook is offered by **CraftED Curriculum** to support schools in designing authentic, student-centered workforce readiness pathways.

For workshops, custom pathway design support, or additional PBL resources, visit **craftedcurriculum.com** or contact jenny@craftedcurriculum.com