



The mission of Weymouth High School is to embed core 21st century skills across the curriculum to prepare students for post-secondary education, careers, and active citizenship. To this end, the **Skill Progression Chart** exists to embed 21st century skills, and the **Career Academies** aim to prepare students for post-secondary education, careers, and active citizenship. Below are commonly asked questions by WHS faculty about these proposals.

### Q: What is the Skill Progression Chart and why should I adopt it for use in my classroom?

A: The Skill Progression Chart is a curriculum document which embeds 21st century skills and their instruction across our curriculum. We defined 21st century skills as strategic reading, problem solving, research, technology, collaboration, and written and oral communication. The chart seeks to bring additional continuity to students' skill instruction, building a strong foundation during their freshmen and sophomore years. The current draft, viewable at our website, allows for instant access to skill definitions and rubrics. At this site, we can also showcase the many ways we are already teaching these skills through a teacher lesson share. Much like a pacing chart for content instruction, the Skill Progression Chart provides a sequential progression of skill instruction tied to portfolio products. The Skill Progression Chart is not designed to be yet another curricular monkey on your back, rather, it is designed with a vision of what we need to fix and what the future holds. These skills could potentially become the new expectations and indicators at Weymouth High School, replacing the current cumbersome expectations and indicators, some of which pose a real quagmire for accreditation. Moreover, this chart aligns with forthcoming frameworks. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is working to embed 21st century skills into its frameworks. A quick review of the current ELA draft will show we are correctly anticipating the framework revisions coming down the pike. The Skill Progression Chart sets us up to be ahead of the curve on our own terms, instead of having to rush frantically to react to new state frameworks.

## Foundation



It is helpful that these skills pacify both NEASC and the DOE, but it is crucial that we lay this foundation for our students. If they are to be competitive and our curriculum to be relevant, we know we need to embed 21st century skills. At the same time, we have understandable reservations. Many of us are held accountable to content driven frameworks and are afraid that we will sacrifice content coverage for skill instruction. Others of us have our own teaching styles and enjoy the creative license afforded in our classrooms. Please note, these concerns are not antithetical to the implementation of the Skill Progression Chart. Just think about the possible benefits of teaching the same basic skills with the same basic approaches to all of our students. Too often we complain that seniors still exhibit the same skill deficiencies as freshman; shouldn't we seek to remedy this? How much time will interdisciplinary skill instruction save the individual classroom teacher who currently must anticipate the same deficiencies each time an important reading or writing assignment rolls around? This will require an investment in the beginning, but just as laying down classroom policies in September pays off exponentially in December, so too will this pay off. We won't have to be dumbfounded anymore when our students don't know how to use a textbook or have never heard of a thesis statement. These are only the basics. Your own style and creative license will no

longer be wasted spending all of your time getting students up to speed. With the Skill Progression Chart, students will now be ready to take your assignments to the next level.

**Q: What are the WHS Career Academies?**

A: The Career Academies at Weymouth High School are smaller learning communities of juniors and seniors. These academies tie a rich 21st century interdisciplinary curriculum to real world opportunities. Students in a Career Academy have the opportunity to *explore* future plans by taking classes from multiple departments in fields of interest, or Career Pathways. The academies provide a recommended course of study, while still allowing students freedom of choice via the selection of academy electives. Career Academies expand learning beyond classroom walls by bringing cohesion to a student's elective schedule, thus fostering connections among a student's classes. The Career Academies bring *purpose* to our students' schedules, ultimately leading them to invest more in their education.

## Exploration



**Q: Will teachers be scheduled into the Career Academies?**

A: No. Career Academies are a grouping of students with similar interests, NOT a teaming of teachers into academies. Teachers will continue to teach electives with the same course content and objectives as before. Students from many different academies will be in your classroom. What's the difference? Your students will be taking the class for an academic purpose and connecting the learning in your classroom to all of their other Career Academy electives. The result will be that you will have more engaged students as they see a larger purpose for the course content.

**Q: Isn't it asking a lot when expecting a sophomore to select a Career Academy?**

A: It is really important here to make sure we know what this student is deciding. First, when a sophomore selects a Career Academy, *he will decide what he will EXPLORE*. He is *not deciding* what he will be for the rest of his life. The selection of a Career Academy is simply the selection of which possible future a student wants to sample *first*. The Core Academies will educate our freshmen and sophomores about this choice so that it may be purposeful and informed. In this context, this decision is an invaluable learning experience, giving our students practice before they make the real high stake decisions of choosing a college, selecting a major, joining the military, or entering the workforce. How much money, time, and angst can we save our students if we allow them to explore their futures while still in the safe confines of high school?

**Q: What if the student wants to transfer into another Career Academy?**

A: Should a student wish to transfer to a new Career Academy they can do so up until the start of senior year. The requirements for the Career Academies are very light during junior year as students are still completing many graduation requirements. The Career Academy courses suggested for a student's junior year are often geared to allow maximum exposure to that pathway, thus letting a student know early on if this is the path for her.

If it isn't, up until the start of her senior year, she can select another Career Academy and in most cases use her junior year courses to meet the requirements of the new selection. Thus in essence, the only thing we are really asking our students to do without any go-back option is to pick their courses for senior year. This is obviously no additional burden to how our students currently select their courses at WHS.

**Q: Won't students in Career Academies be exposed to a narrower range of experiences?**

A: Being in Career Academies and exploring certain career pathways does not mean our students will leave WHS as one-dimensional scholars. Quite the contrary, while completing the varied requirements of their academy, our students will take classes from a host of departments engaging in a rich 21st century interdisciplinary curriculum with ties to the real world. They will study their pathway from many perspectives seeing the complexity and diversity of various disciplines in action. Certainly they will gain expertise in a specific pathway, but they will most importantly leave WHS with a broadened worldview that serve them wonderfully in any future plans.

**Q: Won't Career Academies label our students?**

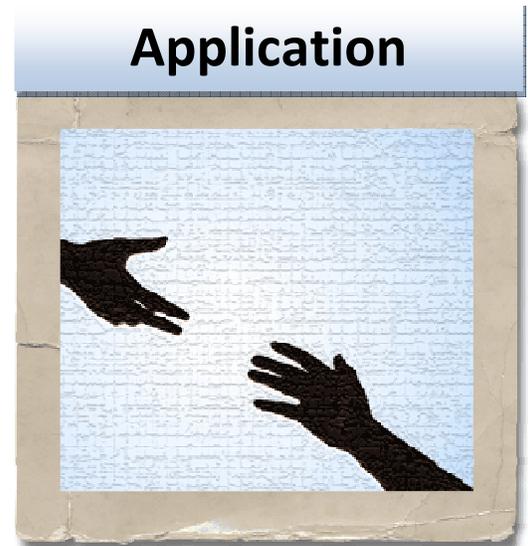
A: Career Academies will give students a connection in their academic lives. It is a human need to feel accepted by others in a positive environment. Our students love feeling connected to their class, their sports teams, their bands and their clubs. They wear sweatshirts, they freeze on uncomfortable bleachers to watch playoff games, they practice in the rain and snow, and they dress as groups in the Big Picture. This is a wonderful aspect of high school, but when do they feel a part of something special in their academic lives? If we are here to educate our students, shouldn't we bring that feeling of community into our classrooms? Imagine the passion and work ethic we could see from our students if they felt like they *belonged* to their Career Academy.

**Q: What other high schools are doing Career Academies?**

A: We are not alone. Nationally, acclaimed schools such as High Tech High in San Diego are making amazing progress. Locally, schools like Westport High School in southern Massachusetts and Brighton High School in Boston have Career Academies. Certainly, there are only a few this far along. Design 21 will put Weymouth at the forefront of those schools leading the charge of innovation across the nation. Our country's current high school model is showing its age. In a world changing faster than the technology that powers it, elements of a system we inherited from the 1800s are no longer doing their job. We have the opportunity to take the lead in preparing our students for their tomorrow today.

**Q: Are there other high schools in our area requiring community service ?**

A: Yes. In 2001 the DESE conducted a survey of the graduation requirements across the state. This is the most recent study of its kind. Even back in 2001, 12.8% of school districts in Massachusetts had community service as a graduation requirement. Since then, other schools are moving in this direction, including neighboring districts like Braintree, West Bridgewater and Carver. You can view this report if you go the FAQ section of our D21 website. In the report you will see many familiar districts including Hingham, Dedham, Natick, Needham, and Scituate. The main goal of Design 21 for the fall of 2009 is to contact these districts, learn from their mistakes and their triumphs, and build a workable community service/internship program for our students.



**Q: Why do we need any of this?**

A: We need to be accredited and we need to anticipate the forthcoming state framework changes. If we do nothing, we lose accreditation and risk not making AYP. Design 21 offers a meaningful solution to our current problems by building off the strengths we already possess. So yes, we *need* this, but more importantly *they* need it. Our students need instruction on the skills that will ready them for their tomorrows. Our students need the freedom to explore their futures in a safe environment. Our students need the opportunity to connect their learning to the real world. Our students need this. This is our chance for their tomorrows.