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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

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**GRADE:** 6

**MONTH:** OCTOBER

**THEME:** IMPROVING  
ACADEMICALLY

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### PATERSON PATHWAYS:

CLEAR, CAREFUL, AND CREATIVE PLANNING FOR LIFE BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

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#### USING THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Paterson Pathways is a life skills and planning curriculum for students in grades 6 through 8. This discussion guide is part of the Paterson Pathways series. It has been designed to be taught in a weekly “advisory” class period.

This *Grade 6 October* packet includes:

- A **weekly Discussion Guide**,
- Ready-to-copy **student Reflection(s)**, and
- A **Resource Guide** with background information for advisors.

#### DISCUSSION GOALS:

Help students review and analyze their grades and test results.

Help students identify their learning styles.

Help students develop academic improvement plans.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

How am I doing academically?

How can I do better?

**WEEK 1:****REVIEW STUDENTS' GOALS**

At last week's advisory session, students were asked to draft a goal statement for their 6<sup>th</sup> grade year. The goal statement was to include goals for the year that were specific, measurable, achievable, rewarding, and time-oriented; and could cover academic, social, athletic, and/or extracurricular activities.

**UPDATING PORTFOLIOS**

To help students make keeping portfolios a habit, each Paterson Pathways guide includes time for students to update their portfolios.

- Distribute a copy of the ***PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST REFLECTION*** to your students and review it with them.
- Explain that this list shows what they should add to their portfolios during 6<sup>th</sup> grade and that they should keep track as they add items.
- Make sure students understand they will be presenting their portfolios to you and their parents or guardians next spring.

If students are to see their portfolios as an important way to keep track of what they've learned, they must get into the habit of using their portfolios: it must become automatic for students to add work samples to their portfolios, or to think to save information about school or community activities in their portfolios.

In addition, students must become familiar with how their portfolios are organized, so that they can easily retrieve information they've saved.

To help students make keeping portfolios a habit, each Paterson Pathways lesson includes time for students to update their portfolios.

To help with this process, please distribute a copy of the ***PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST REFLECTION*** to each student and review it with them. Review the checklist with students. This list itemizes the documents that should be in their portfolios by the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. They should keep track of their portfolios on these checklists as they add new materials.

Tell them that for some materials (such as the goal statements) you will specifically tell them to add an item to their portfolios. In other cases – such as with work samples from their core courses – they will be responsible for adding the items themselves and for keeping track of those items.

Make sure students understand their responsibilities with respect to keeping their portfolios up to date. **In particular, make sure students understand that they will be presenting their portfolios to their**

parents or guardians and to you next spring at their student-led conferences.

**MATERIALS  
NEEDED:**

**Student portfolio.**

Students will need access to their portfolios at each advisory session.

*ANNUAL GOALS REFLECTIONS* from September.

**Student portfolios and *PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST REFLECTION*.**

**STUDENT  
PRODUCTS:**

Students will be expected to create one product from this lesson:

*STUDENT PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST REFLECTION* (*Academic Development Section*).

**WEEK 2:****DISCUSS STUDENT LEARNING STYLES**

Distribute the *LEARNING STYLES* reflection and review it with students. What do they know about how they learn? How can they improve?

**Review the learning styles traits with them.** How many of your students identify themselves as visual learners? How many as auditory learners? How many as kinesthetic learners? Are you surprised? Are they?

**Review the “Learning Styles Tips” on the reflection.** Help students understand how they can study “smarter” depending on their learning style. Discuss the specific things they can do in the classroom and while doing homework to build on their innate strengths and get more out of school.

**MATERIALS  
NEEDED:**

Students will need access to their portfolios at each advisory session.

*LEARNING STYLES* reflection.

**STUDENT  
PRODUCTS:**

Students will be expected to create one product from this lesson:

*LEARNING STYLES* reflection. Students will be able to pinpoint the learning style(s) that describes how they learn best.

## WEEK 3:

**REVIEW ASSESSMENTS**

To succeed in school, students must be able to keep improving, keep learning. And to do that they need to understand where to put their efforts: What are their skills? Where do they need more work?

●**Distribute each student's 5<sup>th</sup> grade NJASK scores.** Remind students this is only one way of measuring their academic progress. Explain how to read scores. Explain how to read them; that is, what the scores in each subject area mean, and the difference between meeting and not meeting standard. You may want to show them the report card for your school or school district or for the state as a whole so they can see how they performed relative to other students. And you may want to spend some time explaining the scoring system in detail. How many points are required to meet standard? What does that mean in terms of each student's scores?

Then ask students to think about the areas where they did well and the areas they need to improve.

●**Then distribute each student's first quarter progress report and any other desired assessments.** Explain your school's grading system, and ask students where they need to improve. Explain the numerical scores that determine an A or a B grade, and, if possible, **help students evaluate exactly how they did in each class** (the difference between an 81% B and an 87% B, for instance). **Again, ask students where they did well and where they need to improve.**

Teachers who write about the art of education routinely acknowledge that their success at teaching is due, at least in part, to their responsiveness to students' needs. They don't teach the same thing every year, or to every student. Instead, they assess each student's performance regularly, discuss with colleagues what they know about students and their progress, and then act on what they learn

You've likely spent a fair amount of time doing this as well this school year, adjusting your curriculum, teaching approach, and the materials you'll cover to meet your students' interests, skills, and needs. And you likely factor in their assessment results as you do this, determining from their grades and exam scores what they're learning easily and what they need more help to master. By pinpointing students' strengths – and weaknesses – you help them succeed even in difficult areas and make them stronger in every subject. That's what makes a good teacher... and what makes teaching so rewarding.

Part of the aim of Paterson Pathways is to help students learn to perform that kind of assessment themselves. Of course, a good teacher can easily

determine where a student is doing well and where he or she is struggling and needs more help... but by middle school it's important that students become full partners in the educational process and learn both how to assess their own performance and skills and how to take steps to improve. This guide is focused around helping your students do just that.

And then, instead of just dismissing their scores with an, "Oh well, I've never been good at math," they'll be asked to develop a strategy for how they can improve in areas where they're weak and how they can build on their skills in areas where they're strong. What are their skills? Where do they need to do more work?

**MATERIALS  
NEEDED:**

**Student portfolios.** Students will need access to their portfolios at each advisory session.

**First quarter progress reports and 5<sup>th</sup> grade scores and other assessment measures as desired.** Please obtain each student's 5<sup>th</sup> grade scores and 6<sup>th</sup> grade first quarter progress reports.

## WEEK 4:

**WRITE ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLANS**

Lead a discussion about how your students can improve in specific subject areas.

After you discuss learning styles and assessment results, please make sure students know that they cannot simply say that they're not good at a certain subject area. You want them to think about **WHY** they didn't do well and **WHAT** they can do to improve.

- Did they simply not understand the material and therefore got a low mark? If so, how can they get help from a tutor or the teacher?
- Did they understand the material but not complete the homework or not do it well? If so, how can they do better next quarter?
- Is the homework load at your school just too heavy for some students? What strategies can they use to manage it? Can they get help from a teacher? (*And, despite last month's discussion about the importance of being involved in extracurricular activities, are some students simply too involved in outside activities to do well at school?*)
- Did they miss too many classes to do well on exams (or not take assessment exams seriously)? If so, how can they motivate themselves to attend class regularly?
- Can they change their study habits to more closely correspond with their strengths due to their learning style?

After you've discussed general strategies for improvement, turn to the specific resources at your school. Does your school have a tutoring program? Can students get help from their teachers? Do you have an improvement program? An after-school study hall program? For students with a Student Learning Plan, are there specific interventions they should be focusing on?

What other things can students do to improve? Can they change their study habits, pledging, for example, to read 30 minutes a day or turn in all homework on time? Is there an adult at home who can review their homework for them?

**Distribute a copy of the *ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN REFLECTION* to each student.** Ask them to answer the questions on the reflection. If you have time, you might want to have students discuss their answers in small groups. Then **ask each student to answer the last question on the reflection by writing a plan for academic improvement this year.**

**MATERIALS  
NEEDED:**

*ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN* and *LEARNING STYLE REFLECTIONS*. Please obtain a copy for each student.

**STUDENT  
PRODUCTS:**

**Updated portfolio.** Each student should update his or her portfolio by adding an *ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN REFLECTION (Academic Development Section)* and checking it off.





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## REFLECTION

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## PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST

### OCTOBER 6<sup>TH</sup> GRADE PORTFOLIO CONTENTS

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By the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade your portfolio should contain the following materials. You will present your portfolio to your parents or guardians and advisor at your student-led conference next spring. **Please keep this checklist with your portfolio and check off each item as you add it to your portfolio.**

#### ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT:

- Annual Goals:** Your goal statement for your 6<sup>th</sup> grade year (*ANNUAL GOALS REFLECTION*).
- Postsecondary Research:** Your completed reflection on the education your dreams will require (*POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION REFLECTION*).
- Four-year Plan:** Your four-year plan (*FOUR-YEAR PLAN REFLECTION*).
- NJASK Scores:** Your NJASK scores from spring of your 5<sup>th</sup> grade year.
- Transcript:** Your complete academic year transcript from 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Academic Improvement Plan:** Your plan to strengthen your academic performance (*ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN REFLECTION*).
- Work Samples:** Work samples (at least **one** from **each** of your core courses):
  - Science
  - Social Studies
  - Math
  - Language Arts
- Optional:*
  - Foreign Language

Other Elective: \_\_\_\_\_

**CAREER DEVELOPMENT:**

- Career Interest Assessment:** Results from any career or interest surveys you take during 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Career Interests Research:** Completed reflection on your interests and aptitudes and your reflection on their relationship to careers (*CAREER INTERESTS REFLECTION*).
- Sample Budget:** Your completed budgeting reflection (*BUDGETING REFLECTION*).

**PERSONAL and SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:**

- Activity Plan:** A short action plan on how to get involved in a school activity that interests you (*ACTIVITIES REFLECTION*).
- Other Activity Information:** Work samples, certificates of accomplishment, awards, photos, or other mementos from extracurricular activities you participate in during 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Student-Led Conference Plan:** Your outline of the points you plan to cover during your 6<sup>th</sup> grade student-led conference (*PLANNING YOUR STUDENT-LED CONFERENCE*).
- Student-Led Conference Reflection:** A short essay reflecting on your performance during your 6<sup>th</sup> grade student-led conference (*STUDENT-LED CONFERENCE REFLECTION*).



# REFLECTION

## LEARNING STYLES

### OCTOBER – 6<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

#### HOW DO YOU LEARN BEST? WHAT IS YOUR LEARNING STYLE?

Everyone has a different way of learning. Study the traits listed in the chart below. Which ones remind you of yourself? The column with the most traits that apply to you likely identifies your learning style:

<p><b>VISUAL LEARNER</b></p>	<p><b>AUDITORY LEARNER</b></p>	<p><b>KINESTHETIC LEARNER</b></p>
<p>I remember things better if I write them down.</p> <p>I can visualize pictures in my head.</p> <p>I take notes on what I read and hear.</p> <p>It helps me understand when I can look at the person who is speaking.</p> <p>It's hard for me to understand what a person is saying when there's background noise.</p> <p>It's easier for me to work in a quiet place.</p> <p>It's easy for me to understand maps, charts, and graphs.</p> <p>When I am concentrating on reading or writing, music bothers me.</p> <p>When taking a test, I can "see" the textbook page and the answer.</p> <p>When I get an idea, I must write it down right away.</p>	<p>When reading, I listen to the words in my head or I read aloud.</p> <p>I need to discuss things to understand them better.</p> <p>I like having someone tell me how to do something rather than reading directions.</p> <p>I prefer hearing a teacher to reading a textbook.</p> <p>I remember what people say better than what they look like.</p> <p>I can easily follow a speaker, even if I'm not looking at him or her.</p> <p>I remember things better if I study aloud with someone.</p> <p>It's hard for me to picture things in my head.</p> <p>I talk myself through homework assignments.</p>	<p>When learning something new, I don't like to read directions or listen to them. I just start right in.</p> <p>I can study better when music is playing.</p> <p>I need frequent breaks when studying.</p> <p>I don't like sitting at a desk. I like to move around.</p> <p>I take notes, but I never go back and re-read them.</p> <p>When I start a book, I like to look at the ending.</p> <p>My notebook and desk may look messy, but I know where things are.</p> <p>I use my fingers to count and move my lips when I read.</p> <p>I daydream in class.</p> <p>I'd rather do a project than write a report.</p>



**LEARNING TIPS: IF YOU ARE A VISUAL LEARNER...**

- Write things down because you'll remember them better that way (quotes, lists, dates, etc.).
- Look at the person who is talking to you. It will help you remain focused.
- It is usually better to work in a quiet place and to work alone. However, many visual learners do math while listening to music playing in the background.
- Ask a teacher to explain something again if you don't understand what you've heard.
- Take lots of notes. Leave extra space to fill in later if you miss some details.
- Copy over your notes. Rewriting may help you recall the information later.
- Use color to highlight main ideas in your notes and reflections.
- Before starting homework, set specific study goals and write them down.
- Preview a chapter before reading by first looking at all the pictures, section headings, etc.
- Select a seat far away from the door and windows and toward the front of the class, if possible.
- Write vocabulary words in color on index cards with short definitions on the back. Look through them frequently, and then write out the definitions again to check yourself.

**LEARNING TIPS: IF YOU ARE AN AUDITORY LEARNER...**

- Try studying with a friend so that you can talk out loud and hear the information.
- Read aloud any facts that you want to remember (quotes, lists, dates, etc.).
- Record classroom lectures, or read class notes onto a tape. Try to listen to your recorded notes three times.
- Before reading a chapter, look at all the headings and picture captions and read them aloud.
- Write vocabulary words in color on index cards with short definitions on the back of each card. Review them frequently by reading the words and saying the definitions aloud.
- Before beginning an assignment, set a specific study goal and say it aloud.
- Read aloud whenever possible. In a quiet place, try hearing the words in your head as you read silently. Your brain needs to "hear" the words as your eyes read them.
- Use color and graphic symbols to highlight main ideas in your notes, textbooks, reflections, etc.

**LEARNING TIPS: IF YOU ARE A KINESTHETIC LEARNER...**

- To memorize, walk around while reciting to yourself or looking at a list or index card.
- When reading a textbook chapter, first look at the pictures, then read the summary or end-of-chapter questions. Then, look over the section headings and bold-faced words. Get a “feel” for the whole chapter by reading the end first, then working your way towards the front of the chapter. This is called working “whole-to-part.”
- If you need to fidget when in class, experiment with ways of moving that don’t disturb others.
- You may not study best at a desk, so when you’re at home, try studying on your bed or while walking around. Also, try studying with music playing in the background.
- If you have a stationary bicycle, try reading while pedaling.
- Use a bright color on your desk. This is called “color grounding” and will help focus your attention. You might want to try reading through a color transparency. Experiment with different colors and different ways of using color.
- While studying, take breaks as frequently as you need to. Just be sure to get right back on task.
- When trying to memorize information, try closing your eyes and writing information in the air or on a desk or carpet with your finger. Picture the words in your head as you do this. If possible, hear them, too. Later, when trying to recall the information, close your eyes and remember your actions.

## MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR LEARNING STYLE

How do you learn best? Do you learn best by seeing things, hearing them, or acting them out? What can you do at school – and when you’re doing your homework – to take advantage of your unique learning style?

Think about your learning style as you review your grades and write your academic improvement plan.

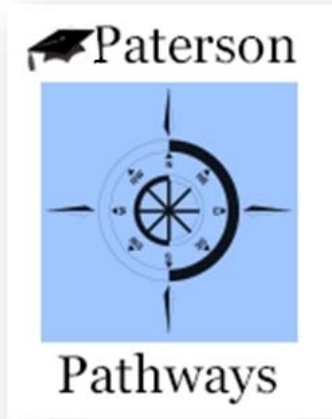
Maybe you don’t need to study more... but just need to study smarter!

Can you change the way you study to build on your natural strengths? If you’re a visual learner, can you focus more on writing and drawing to learn? If you’re an auditory learner, can you focus more on hearing things to learn? If you’re a kinesthetic learner, can you focus more on acting things out to learn?

How can your family and teachers help you learn better?

Share this reflection with your parents or guardians. They might be surprised to see how you learn, and they might learn something about their own learning styles too!

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# REFLECTION

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## ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN OCTOBER 6<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

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You've seen your scores from last spring and your first report card from middle school. How did you do? How can you do better?

Answer the questions on this reflection and then make a plan for academic performance for the year.

### WHAT ARE YOUR BEST SUBJECT AREAS?

- Reading
- Writing
- Language Arts
- Math
- Science
- Social Studies
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_.

How well did you do?

Were you surprised by your good performance? Why were you surprised?

Why do you think you did well?

How can you continue to do well?

### WHERE DO YOU NEED TO IMPROVE?

- Reading
- Writing
- Language Arts
- Math
- Science
- Social Studies
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_.

How did you do?

Were you surprised that you didn't do as well as you expected? Why were you surprised?

Why didn't you do well?

How can you improve?

### **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE?**

List below the steps you can take to improve your academic performance this year.

- Study more
- Turn in all homework on time and attend class
- Find different ways to study that help me remember information better
- Find a tutor at school
- Get extra help from a teacher
- Find a catch-up study session
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_.

### **WHAT IS YOUR ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR THE YEAR?**

*(Please write a short response. You'll discuss this with your advisor next month.)*





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## RESOURCE GUIDE

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR LEAD ADVISORS AND INTERESTED TEACHERS ON:

#### GRADE 6 – OCTOBER IMPROVING ACADEMICALLY

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#### USING THIS RESOURCE GUIDE:

Each Paterson Pathways I discussion guide includes a *Resource Guide* for advisors. The *Resource Guide* has been prepared as a handy reference to give you more information on the following topics:

- **Essential Questions.** Each Paterson Pathways discussion guide is built around a theme, and each theme includes two Essential Questions. Focusing on these Essential Questions will help your students retain information from this lesson.
- **New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards.** Each Paterson Pathways discussion guide is based on NJCCCS from the relevant grade's Grade Level Expectations.
- **ASCA Standards.** Each Paterson Pathways discussion guide is based on American School Counselor Association (ASCA) standards.
- **Community-building Opportunities.** The *Resource Guide* suggests several community-building opportunities related to each discussion. You and your students can pursue them if you wish.
- **Additional Activities.** The *Resource Guide* also suggests supplemental activities for your group if you have more time, or if you want to devote more attention to a particular theme.

**ESSENTIAL  
QUESTIONS:**

Each Paterson Pathways discussion guide is built around a theme. Each theme repeats each year to help organize the curriculum and, through this annual repetition, to help students retain key points about the lessons they are learning.

Each month's theme includes several "Essential Questions." These questions inform the content of the lesson plan and the student assignments, building on the theme to help students remember the key points from the discussion. These essential questions will also be used later in the year to help students organize their presentations for their student-led conferences.

This month's theme is **Improving Academically**. The Essential Questions are:

- How am I doing academically?
- How can I do better?

The end of students' first quarter of middle school is an ideal opportunity to help students assess how they are doing academically and how they can do better. They are likely taking much more challenging courses than they took in earlier grades, and may not have a good idea – until they see their grades – how well they're doing.

This guide will combine a review of assessment results – from students' report cards from 6<sup>th</sup> grade and scores from 5<sup>th</sup> grade – with a discussion about the tools students can use to improve their academic performance. (Remember that there are many ways to assess students' performance. This is only one way. Be sure students understand that, and understand how their learning styles affect how they work.)

Focus on the two essential questions as you lead students through the lesson. How can they evaluate how they are doing? And then, once they have that information, how can they make plans to improve?

Helping students think about what they can do to get help to improve will also be important. What resources does your school offer to students who need academic help? How can you use this lesson to identify students at the first sign of difficulty and help them improve? How can students work together to help each other?

You might want to discuss, in particular, how the students in your advisory group can help each other. Can your students form a study group together, or help each other to remember assignments? How can you build on the community of your group to help all your students succeed?



**COMMUNITY-BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES:**

Part of the aim of the Paterson Pathways curriculum is to help students grow into a larger role in their community. Each discussion guide in the Paterson Pathways curriculum highlights opportunities to help students think about or actually take on a larger role in either the school community or the larger community in which they live.

**This guide has a more introspective focus than many Paterson Pathways guides, because it is fundamentally about understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses.** By understanding how they're doing at school – and why they're succeeding or not succeeding in their classes – your students will be able to take action to improve.

Of course, even with as individual an activity as assessing one's performance in school, there are opportunities for community-building.

- **Advisory study group.** Would it help the students in your advisory group to meet as a study group once or twice a week?
- **Student tutors and mentors.** Are there opportunities at your school to help the students in your group help others through a tutoring or mentoring program?
- **Service to younger students.** Can your students learn and provide help by tutoring elementary school students or adults who are learning English as a second language?

**ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:**

If you have accomplished all the activities outlined in this discussion guide and want additional activities for your students, you may wish to:

- **Spend additional time reviewing assessment results.** If you have more time, you can provide more detailed information to students or review different types of assessment results. And you can help them learn more about exactly how much they need to improve.
- **Schedule a one-on-one conference with each student.** Schedule a short conference with each student to review his or her academic improvement plan and offer suggestions.

**PREPARING FOR NEXT MONTH:**

Next month's Paterson Pathways session is focused on helping students plan for next year. Here's how you can plan ahead for next month:

- Obtain a copy of first marking period report cards for each student when they become available.
- Remind students to bring work samples from all disciplines to your next meeting.



**N.J.C.C.C.S.  
MATHEMATICS****Number Sense**

- 4.1.6.A.1 Use real-life experiences. Physical materials, and technology to construct meanings for numbers.

**Mathematical Processes**

- 4.5.6.B.1 Use communication to organize and clarify their mathematical thinking.
- Reading and writing.
  - Discussion, listening, and questioning.
- 4.5.6.B.2 Communicate their mathematical thinking coherently and clearly to peers, teachers, and others, both orally and in writing.
- All integers
  - All fractions as part of a whole, as subset of a set, as a location on a number line, and as divisions of whole numbers.
  - All decimals

**LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY****Writing**

- 3.2.6.B.8 Prepare a works consulted page for reports or research papers.
- 3.2.6.D.1 Write for different purposes (e.g. to express ideas, inform, entertain, respond to literature, persuade, question, reflect, clarify, share) and a variety of audiences (e.g. self, peers, community).
- 3.2.6.D.2 Gather, select, and organize information appropriate to a topic, task, and audience.
- 3.2.6.D.10 Use a variety of strategies to organize writing, including sequence, chronology, cause/effect, problem/solution, and order of importance.

**Speaking**

- 3.3.6.A.2 Present ideas and opinions spontaneously in response to a topic or other speakers.
- 3.3.6.C.1 Paraphrase, illustrate, clarify, and/or expand on a topic or idea.
- 3.3.6.C.2. Develop and use advanced vocabulary related to a topic.
- 3.3.6.C.3 Use language that stimulates an audience's interest.

**Listening**

- 3.4.6.A.1 Listen actively for a variety of purposes such as enjoyment and obtaining information.
- 3.4.6.A.3 Acknowledge the speaker through eye contact and use appropriate feedback and question clarify the speaker's message.

**ASCA  
STANDARDS:**

The Paterson Pathways curriculum is based on the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, to provide teachers and students with a clear way to integrate school counseling and academic achievement. This lesson plan focuses on the following ASCA Standards:

**ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT**

- A:A2 Acquire skills for improving learning (Demonstrate how effort and persistence positively affect learning, Use communication skills to know when and how to ask for help when needed).
- A:A3 Achieve school success (Demonstrate dependability, productivity and initiative).
- A:B1 Improve learning (Organize and apply academic information from a variety of sources).

