



DISCUSSION GUIDE

GRADE: 8

MONTH: OCTOBER

THEME: IMPROVING
ACADEMICALLY

PATERSON PATHWAYS:

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

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 8 October* packet includes:

- A weekly **Discussion Guide**,
- Ready-to-copy **student reflection(s)**
- A **Resource Guide** 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.

Help students reflect on their classes this year and on assessments they’ve taken.

Help students develop an **Academic Goal**

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

How am I doing academically?

How can I do better?



WEEK 1:**REVIEW ACADEMIC PROGRESS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL**

This discussion can be used as a chance to help students review the procedure for logging on to any online grades or records programs your district offers. Also the use of the school's website to keep track of work assignments especially if any was missed. Advisors can ascertain that students not only understand the logistics of how to use these systems, but that they also understand how to gain helpful information from them and that they are able to be reflective about what they learn.

Review opportunities for students to keep track of their work. Does your school district offer a way for students and parents to access their school records electronically or on paper? If so, remind students how to use it, and provide information to parents. Explain that it's important for students to have a good sense of how they're doing in school. That way they won't risk falling too far behind without realizing it.

Discuss students' academic performance this year. What have students learned about their performance so far? What do their NJASK scores from last year tell them? What about other assessments? More generally, what do they think of 8th grade classes? How are they doing? Why? What do they think would help them do better in their classes this year?

**MATERIALS
NEEDED:**

Students' first progress reports

Students' 7th grade NJASK scores (*or other assessments, if desired*)



WEEK 2:

DEVELOPING ACADEMIC GOALS

Have students develop Academic Goals. Distribute the *ACADEMIC GOAL* reflection. Ask students to complete the goal statement with one goal for 8th grade. Let them know that these goals should be based on how they are doing so far this year.

Each goal should be “*SMART*,” that is:

- **Specific:** A goal that is specific has a much greater chance of being accomplished than one that is vague. A vague goal would be, “*I want to do well in school this year.*” But a specific goal would be, “*I want to get above a 3.0 GPA.*”
- **Measurable:** A measurable goal includes concrete criteria for measuring progress. When students measure their progress (through their grades, classes taken, clubs joined, attendance, or homework completed), they are more likely to stay on track and keep working toward their goals.
- **Achievable:** Students’ goals must be realistic and achievable for 6th grade. Learning to play the violin this year by participating in the school orchestra would be a realistic goal; learning to drive this year would likely not.
- **Rewarding:** Students’ goals should be positive rather than negative and, if possible, fun to achieve. Each goal should list something the student wants to do or wants to make happen.
- **Time-oriented:** Goals are more likely to be achieved when there is a target date. Students will have many opportunities to develop long-term goals for their lives. For this exercise, though, their goals should all be for this school year, and each goal should be able to be accomplished by the end of the school year.

Students should begin their goal statements now and finalize them at next month’s advisory meeting.

**MATERIALS
NEEDED:**

Student portfolios should be available to students at every session.

ACADEMIC GOAL reflection

**STUDENT
PRODUCTS:**

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

ACADEMIC GOAL reflection.



WEEK 3:**LEARNING STYLES AND STUDY TIPS**

Discuss how classes are going. Students are now in their last year of middle school. They may have their first quarter grades by now, and even if not, should have a good sense of how they are doing. Discuss students' classes and their grades to date, as well as other assessments students have completed. How are they doing with their classes? Are they keeping up?

Discuss graduation requirements. Next, review your school's graduation requirements with your students. What will it take – in terms of grades, credits, or behavior – for each of them to graduate from middle school next spring and continue on to high school? If any of your students have failed a class or need to do other work to graduate on time, this is a good time to ensure that they and their parents understand what must be done.

Distribute a copy of the *LEARNING STYLES* reflection and show students how they can study “smarter” by building on their strengths. They have discussed these styles in advisory each year. Have they seen a difference in their learning style? Have any of the tips been helpful, if so share which ones worked for them.

**MATERIALS
NEEDED:**

LEARNING STYLES reflection



WEEK 4:**ACADEMIC INVENTORIES**

The end of the first quarter is an ideal opportunity to help students assess how the students are doing academically and how they can do better. They are likely taking more challenging courses than they took last year, and may not have a good idea – until they see their grades – how they are doing.

This discussion combines a review of assessment results – from students' courses, report cards, assessment exams, and 7th grade NJASK – with a discussion about the tools students can use to improve their academic performance.

Teachers who write about the art of education routinely acknowledge that their success in 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 help students learn to build on their strengths and strengthen their weaknesses. By creating an **Academic Inventory** – and revisiting it each year – students will be able to build on their advisors' knowledge and learn to assess and evaluate their own work.

Discuss how to assess performance. Continue your discussion by asking students about the factors that have contributed to their performance in their classes. How important is attending class? What about completing homework assignments? How many students feel they simply do not understand what is being taught in class?

Have students develop Academic Inventories. Distribute a copy of the *ACADEMIC INVENTORY* reflection to each student. Help students use information about their grades and assessment results to do to complete the handout and then develop a plan to improve their performance.

**MATERIALS
NEEDED:**

ACADEMIC INVENTORY reflection

Information about students' grades and/or assessment results (*from your lead advisor*)

**STUDENT
PRODUCTS:**

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

ACADEMIC INVENTORY reflection





REFLECTION

ACADEMIC GOALS

OCTOBER – 8TH GRADE

Name: _____

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE THIS YEAR?

You're now in your third and final year of middle school. What do you want to achieve this year?

How are you doing in your classes so far? What about the assessment exams you've taken?

Based on that information, think of your biggest academic goal for this year. Do you want to...

- Get a certain GPA (say, 3.0)?
- Pass all your classes?
- Do all your homework?
- Meet standard on all sections of the NJASK next spring?
- Get into an honors class?
- Learn another language?

What do you want to do? Please write at least one goal below for your academic achievements this year.

Remember that your goal should be "SMART," that is:

- **Specific** rather than general (*Such as: "I want to get a 3.0 GPA this year"*).
- **Measurable** by what you will do during the year (*by grades or test scores, for instance*).
- **Achievable** or realistic for 8th grade.
- **Rewarding** so that you will feel you've accomplished something.
- **Time-oriented** and able to be finished by the end of the school year.

ACADEMIC GOAL:

While I am in 8th grade, I want to _____.

This will help me succeed academically because



REFLECTION

LEARNING STYLES

OCTOBER – 8TH GRADE

Everyone has a different way of learning. These different ways are called “multiple intelligences.” That is, we are all intelligent, but in different ways!

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:

VISUAL LEARNER	AUDITORY LEARNER	KINESTHETIC LEARNER
<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 by yourself.
- 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 handouts.
- 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, handouts, 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 inventory.

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 handout 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!



REFLECTION

ACADEMIC INVENTORY

OCTOBER – 8TH GRADE

Name _____

Please use information about your grades to answer the questions on this handout.

HOW ARE YOU DOING IN YOUR CLASSES THIS YEAR?

(Note your grade and whether you think you are doing well or not)

Language Arts: _____

Math: _____

Science: _____

Social Studies: _____

Elective (): _____

Elective (): _____

What factors contributed to your performance?

- Studying at home or at school
- Finding new ways to study and to manage the middle school workload
- Turning in homework assignments on time
- Attending class
- Working with a tutor at school
- Getting extra help from a teacher
- Attending a catch-up study session
- Other: _____

ACADEMIC INVENTORY, Continued**WHERE ARE YOU DOING WELL?**

In which classes did you do best?

Were you surprised at how well you did?

Why do you think you did so well?

WHERE DO YOU NEED TO IMPROVE?

In which classes do you need to improve?

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

How can you improve?

WHAT IS YOUR PLAN TO DO BETTER ACADEMICALLY? *(Please write a short response about how you can strengthen your academic performance.)*





RESOURCE GUIDE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR LEAD ADVISORS AND INTERESTED TEACHERS ON:

GRADE 8 – OCTOBER IMPROVING ACADEMICALLY

USING THIS RESOURCE GUIDE:

Each Paterson Pathways 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 discussion.
- **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 lesson plan 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 discussion guide and the student reflections, 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 7th grade, and may not have a good idea – until they see their grades – how well they're doing.

This discussion will combine a review of assessment results – from students' report cards from 8th grade and scores from 7th 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 discussion. 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 guide 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 discussion students grow into a larger role in their community. Each 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 lessons, 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's Paterson Pathways session is focused on helping



NEXT MONTH:

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**

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

Mathematical Processes

4.5.8.B.1 Use communication to organize and clarify their mathematical thinking, reading and writing, discussion, listening, and questioning.

4.5.8.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**

3.2.8.B.8 Prepare a works consulted page for reports or research papers.

3.2.8.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).

3.2.8.D.2 Gather, select, and organize information appropriate to a topic, task, and audience.

3.2.8.D.10 Use a variety of strategies to organize writing, including sequence, chronology, cause/effect, problem/solution, and order of importance.

Speaking

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

Listening

- 3.4.8.A.1 Listen actively for a variety of purposes such as enjoyment and obtaining information.
- 3.4.8.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).

