



The Gateway Diplomas Program Frequently Asked Questions

Mission

To emphasize the exploration of individual, career-based interests through rigorous coursework and experiential learning, leading to a deeper understanding of the skills necessary for a successful college and career path.

What is the origin of the Gateway Diplomas?

Two of our core values are *Love of Learning* and *Intellectual Risk-Taking*. The idea stemmed from our desire to grow in these areas by strengthening academic rigor, offering more challenges to our students, and providing applied learning opportunities that engage students with 21st-century real-life skills. Jalaj Desai, Head of School, presented this vision to Karen Ferretti, Director of College Counseling, who conceived of the diplomas as a way to make our school profile stronger while increasing the opportunities for our students to stand out in the college application process.

The Gateway Diplomas Program was the culmination of months of research, study, and collaboration. The tracks were developed in consultation with the faculty, and approved by the Curriculum Council.

Are students required to choose a Gateway Diploma track?

The Gateway Diplomas Program will not appeal to all SRDS students, and participation is not required. Students who choose not to participate will still need to meet the requirements for graduation with a traditional SRDS diploma.

How is this diploma offering different from a traditional SRDS diploma?

The traditional diploma and diploma requirements have not changed. We view the Gateway Diplomas as an enhancement to our diploma offerings. A Gateway Diploma **requires** additional honors/AP coursework, field research, presentations, and extra-curricular involvement. Due to the requirements for each track, this might not be the best match for every student.

The Diplomas Program should not add undue stress or pressure for our students. We maintain our core value of *Everyone Counts*, and we believe in a close-knit community that challenges students at all levels and interests.

When do students have to identify their track? Will they have an opportunity to change their selection?

Students may choose a Gateway Diploma track at the end of 9th grade and in 10th grade. Before making this decision, students will receive an overview of the Diploma program and tracks available, and then have individual meetings to discuss this option with their 9th-grade advisor. The advisor will also use part of the spring conference time to discuss the options as well as a student's readiness for the program.

It will be difficult for a student to change diplomas, from Arts to Innovation and Entrepreneurship, for example, given the research and study required outside of the classroom. However, it might be possible for a student to switch tracks within the diploma (switching from Humanities to Civic Engagement, for example), depending on when a student expresses this interest. The faculty mentor and student advisor will consult on this decision.

The Gateway Program is designed for a student that has a clear-cut knowledge base and passion in one of the tracked areas and is looking for a greater depth of study and experience. Therefore, it is generally unlikely that a student, once committed to a track, will desire to change.

If a student is on the fence between two diplomas, will an advisor help them make a decision?

The 9th-grade advisors will help students with the selection process. The advisor will also discuss the program with the student's parents, making sure the entire family understands the level of commitment it will take to complete the diploma. Students will need assistance and direction during this process, and everyone must be working together to help the student succeed. Families with 9th and 10th graders will also discuss their options with the Assistant Director of College Counseling. Finally, gateway faculty mentors can provide further insight into each track.

Will the school help students find internships or fieldwork during the break or over the summer?

Yes, we recommend that students conduct their field experience and research during vacations and breaks, especially between 10th and 11th grade. Students can continue their field experience in the summer between 11th and 12th grade, but we do not recommend that students start their field experiences this late into high school.

Once a student chooses a track, they will add a faculty mentor in that area of study. That mentor will also help facilitate internship and research opportunities, which will also be coordinated by an on-site mentor.

Will there be opportunities for internships for individuals who choose not to participate in the diploma programs?

Yes, all SRDS students will still have the opportunity to apply for internships. All students will participate in career days, both on campus and on-site, in a career field of their interest. Students will also benefit from conversations with the Head of the Upper School, the College Counseling Office, and academic advisors.

What is the field experience required for the different tracks?

It depends on what the student hopes to accomplish with their research. It could range from working with a composer or interning in an art gallery, to assisting in a senator's office, campaigning on the local level, studying abroad, or developing a business plan and launching an app. Students are not required to do one specific thing: they will have myriad opportunities to personalize the field experience and papers/presentations. We are excited to see what our scholars choose to do!

Will a student that completes the Gateway program have an advantage in applying to college? How will this help boost a student's application?

Yes, if this is truly a student's passion. Colleges are looking for students who are authentic and motivated in their experiences and interests. Now, more than ever, colleges are viewing their applicants through a holistic lens. Who a student is - character, leadership, clearly identified academic interests - all matter to colleges in a time when schools move further away from a strict GPA/standardized testing review. Students will need to speak persuasively and passionately about their topic in interviews and on college applications. For a student that is doing this for the right reasons - increased rigor, broader experiences, more profound research opportunities, coordinated academics and extra-curricular - this program will give him/her a better story to tell college admissions offices.

A student should not complete the diploma only because it will "make their application look stronger in comparison." There is significant work required outside of the classroom, and students will only be successful if they are motivated to succeed and prepared for the additional rigor.

Are other schools offering a program similar to this, or is this unique to SRDS?

No, there is not another school in our area that provides a comprehensive graduation track like this (in multiple subject areas), which also includes fieldwork, presentations, and coordination with clubs and activities.

A Gateway Diploma will be a significant differentiator in the college application process for the students who complete the program. Other schools might have focus programs or capstone projects, but they don't have a graduation track like we are offering.