

Rigor and Purpose for Transformative Learning

Rigor and purpose are the backbone of transformative learning experiences and a true pathway to equity in the classroom. Together they create opportunities for deep—and deeply engaged—learning and the development of valued competencies. Well-designed, meaningful learning experiences leverage rigor and purpose to challenge students to think critically, ignite engagement and personal interest, and give students a rationale for digging deep.

This document defines rigor and purpose in learning experiences. At Springpoint, we see rigor and purpose as mutually reinforcing—both are essential to ensuring that students have a high quality learning experience. But in the interest of clarity, we have broken them out and zoomed in on the components that comprise each of these important practices.

For more practical resources and tools for transforming learning and creating student-centered schools, please visit www.springpointschools.org.

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Rigor

Skills & Standards Alignment

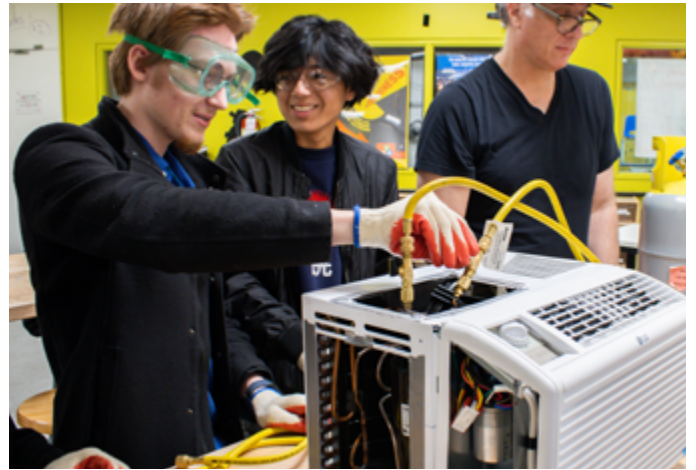
- ⓧ Learning experiences center transferable themes, concepts, and skills; they prioritize opportunities for students to practice critical thinking and other competencies most essential for post-secondary success.
- ⓧ Learning experiences promote coherence by spiraling key concepts and skills within and across units.
- ⓧ Learning experiences prioritize the most critical cross-disciplinary components of the Common State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, SAT, and other reputable sources of college and career-ready standards.

Student Thinking

- ⓧ Learning experiences are centered around a driving question that lacks an obvious solution or answer, often providing opportunities for students to challenge commonly accepted truths.
- ⓧ Learning experiences demand critical thinking, inviting students to be discerning consumers of text, data, and other media, empowering them with the tools to evaluate evidence, scrutinize the claims of others, and develop original assertions as they learn to think for themselves.
- ⓧ Learning experiences include opportunities for students to practice disciplinary reasoning through scientific and historical investigations, analysis and development of quantitative models, and frequent close-reading.

Cognitive Lift & Independence

- ⓧ Learning experiences incorporate opportunities that require students—not teachers—to construct and create meaning, as opposed to receiving and reciting information.
- ⓧ Learning experiences embed opportunities for students to engage in metacognitive reflection about the content as well as about themselves as learners so that they are able to transfer what they have learned to novel situations.



Materials, Modalities, & Student Products

- ⓧ Learning experiences ensure that instructional materials are at or above grade level in terms of Lexile level, thematic complexity, and standards-alignment.
- ⓧ Learning experiences leverage scaffolds that do not lower the rigor for students, but rather provide access to complex concepts through appropriate modification.
- ⓧ Learning experiences require students to formulate a written, analytic response using evidence to support all claims and analysis.
- ⓧ Learning experiences incorporate ongoing opportunities for students to collaborate, exchange ideas, and share their work, often in the form of a culminating exhibition.

Expectations for Student Work

- ⓧ Learning experiences push students beyond the easy and obvious to deepen their thinking through the use of transparent exemplars, rigorous criteria, and transferable feedback.
- ⓧ Learning experiences promote a mastery orientation offering students multiple opportunities to practice skills and revise their work.

Purpose

Authenticity

- ① Learning experiences require students to engage in authentic problem solving around existing tensions and challenges, and provide opportunities to advocate for change in their lives, in their communities, and at a global level.
- ② Learning experiences require students to create products that are used in the “real world”—such as editorials, podcasts, etc.—to express ideas, persuade others, and advocate for change.
- ③ Learning experiences puncture the “school to real world barrier” by giving students an opportunity to show what they know and who they are to authentic audiences of experts, community members, and peers.
- ④ Learning experiences connect students with experts who provide guidance, coaching, and/or feedback; learning is consistently connected to the outside world via field trips, guest speakers, interviews of community members, etc.

Relevance

- ① Learning experiences ensure that students understand what they are learning, why they are learning it, and how the content and/or skills that they have learned can be applied.
- ② Learning experiences intentionally tap into students’ funds of knowledge—their passions, relationships, and identities—so that they can see themselves in what they are learning and use new schema as a bridge to access unfamiliar content or challenging concepts.
- ③ Learning experiences prioritize a focus on content and topics that are “of the moment” and/or part of an enduring societal debate. Current events, conversations, video, music, film, and other iconic sources serve as a gateway for the exploration of broader historical themes.

Identity

- ① Learning experiences deepen students’ understanding of themselves, their culture, and their community, while also encouraging them to explore new questions, subjects, and experiences.
- ② Learning experiences embed creative expression, providing opportunities for students to unlock and showcase their interests and passions.
- ③ Learning experiences support students in unpacking and wrestling with the ethical considerations and questions embedded in the content they are learning, allowing students to develop or refine their own ethical framework and beliefs.
- ④ Learning experiences center on the lives, perspectives, and viewpoints of a diverse array of actors, groups, and individuals, explicitly emphasizing the strengths and stories of historically marginalized communities.

Agency

- ① Learning experiences develop agency in young people by intentionally and strategically phasing in purposeful opportunities for choice and voice in what is being learned, how it is being learned, and how students can choose to share what they have learned.
- ② Learning experiences empower young people and develop their leadership by valuing their voice and perspective and by giving them a seat at the tables where decision-makers are in dialogue.

NOTE

Springpoint’s approach to Rigor and Purpose has been informed by decades of research on adolescent development and psychology, cognitive science, culturally responsive pedagogy, and more. This resource draws on a variety of broadly accepted frameworks, including: [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#); [A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching](#); [Learning for Justice Social Justice Standards](#); [Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy](#); [Theories of Adolescent Development](#); [The Core Science of Adolescent Development](#); [CASEL Framework for SEL](#); [Transformative Social and Emotional Learning](#); [Self-Determination Theory](#); [Metacognition & Learning to Learn](#)