

Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners™

Learning Criteria Dimensions
FOUNDATION LEARNING Achievement in English, math, science and other subjects
STRETCH LEARNING Rigorous and relevant learning beyond minimum requirements
LEARNER ENGAGEMENT Motivation to learn, relationships that support learning, and a sense of belonging
PERSONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT Personal, social, service, and leadership skills and positive behaviors/attitudes

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What does a “21st century learner” need to know and be able to do? How does a school know if it is serving its students well and meeting their need to become lifelong learners? The Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners serves as a lens through which educators can see if their school is meeting the learning needs of their students for the 21st century.

A score on a test should not be the only measure of academic achievement and school success. Although states are required by *No Child Left Behind* to monitor assessment results in English language arts, mathematics and science, most educators and the public recognize that state tests are too narrow to be the sole basis for determining school effectiveness. **Schools need to look at state testing requirements as the beginning line, not the finish line.**

To address the broader needs of 21st century learners and at the same time enhance students’ ability to “pass the test,” schools need to take a broader view of learning in deciding what makes someone “graduation-ready” and a lifelong learner.

Turning Beliefs into Actions

The Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners can help a school turn its beliefs about education, students, and learning into priorities for school improvement by looking at the *whole* school and the *whole* student. Every school has its own unique situation, strengths, challenges, goals, personnel, leadership, demographics, history, and other variables. That’s the school’s “DNA.”

The Learning Criteria is based on four dimensions that can help a school better define how well it is meeting the needs of all learners:

1. Foundation Learning
2. Stretch Learning
3. Learner Engagement
4. Personal Skill Development

Foundation Learning This dimension looks at indicators of the school’s fundamental academic strengths as measured by state tests, other assessment results, graduation requirements, and others.

Stretch Learning. This dimension encourages a school to examine the degree to which all students are challenged to attempt rigorous coursework, push themselves to take specialized courses, and undertake interdisciplinary projects, for example. Stretch Learning connects to some basic beliefs about understanding and playing to the potential and strengths of learners.

Learner Engagement. Engagement is a critical aspect of the learning process which results from connectedness, seeing value in learning, feeling safe and cared about, and being actively and purposefully part of a school community. One place for a school to begin measuring this dimension is by surveying the students and staff as to their sense of satisfaction, belonging, security, and accomplishment.

Personal Skill Development. This dimension deals with development of positive character traits, good work habits, and social, service, and leadership skills that not only enhance learning, but also extend to the world beyond school.

Describing multiple criteria for student learning is an innovative and positive approach for schools to implement changes that will result in rigorous and relevant learning for all students, supported by strong, positive relationships.

The Learning Criteria is a versatile and user-friendly tool for turning a school's shared beliefs about learning and about students into deliberate actions. The Learning Criteria is not only a way to evaluate school effectiveness and determine needs, but also a mechanism to help educators actualize their beliefs by focusing on four learning dimensions.

The Learning Criteria was originally designed as an objective process to identify "proven" high schools in conjunction with a five-year initiative being carried out by the International Center for Leadership in Education/Successful Practices Network, co-sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. A list of the participants in the design process can be found at the end of this document.

While some schools have made the Learning Criteria a part of their school improvement planning process, a more common approach is to use it for such purposes as:

- redefining the mission of the school within a culture of high expectations
- establishing a comprehensive school accountability system with relevant measures beyond standardized test scores
- establishing goals and identifying responsibilities for all stakeholders in efforts to reinvent existing programs
- assessing the comprehensiveness of the state-mandated school improvement plan
- raising school performance in all four dimensions

Putting the Learning Criteria to Use

The four dimensions of the Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners are interrelated. This interconnectedness contributes to the benefit of the Learning Criteria's holistic approach. Moreover, looking at multiple aspects of school performance and student needs informs thinking and decision making about individual aspects.

As schools develop strength in providing many varied opportunities for Stretch Learning, Personal Skill Development, and Learner Engagement, they find that all three dimensions support students' growth and achievement to meet Foundation Learning requirements. Engagement aids academic learning, because students who are actively engaged in school inside and outside the classroom achieve at higher levels. Stretch learning can promote engagement. Students who are encouraged to "reach higher" and who are supported in venturing outside their comfort zone often take greater responsibility for their own learning. Developing such personal skills as good organizational habits, collaborative attitudes, positive character traits, and listening skills scaffolds and enhances learning and engagement.

One of the uses of the Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners is to guide schools in the development of quantitative indicators of student achievement in the four dimensions of Foundation Learning, Stretch Learning, Learner Engagement, and Personal Skill Development.

In this process, schools are encouraged to select indicators and related data collection processes that are consistent with their goals and beliefs. The objective is to help a school set meaningful goals and measure progress for the purpose of improving student achievement in the required academic subjects by developing skills in the other three dimensions.

A school should identify data indicators in each of the four dimensions. To the extent possible, indicators should apply to the entire student population. To identify successes and maximize its usefulness, the data collected should be viewed from the following perspectives:

- **School Performance** – Express in measurable terms
- **Disaggregated** – Data for all subgroups
- **Sustained** – Begin to compile trend data to show progress
- **Benchmarked** – Compare to similar schools, schools in state, schools in nation or accepted norms

Foundation Learning				
Academic learning in English language arts (reading/writing), mathematics, science and other subjects identified by the school				
Data Indicator	School Performance	Disaggregated	Sustained	Benchmarked

Sample Data Indicators

K-8

- Percentage of students meeting proficiency level of state testing requirements
- Achievement levels on standardized tests/assessments other than state exams, e.g., Lexile, DRA's (Developmental Reading Assessment), STAR, Scholastic Reading Inventory
- Percentage of performance-based assessments aligned with state and district standards used in reading, math, writing, and science (portfolio development, student-led conferencing, etc.)
- Percentage of ESL/LEP learners who meet district and state testing or assessment standards

9-12

- Percentage of students meeting proficiency level on state tests
- Average scores on ACT/SAT/PSAT
- Achievement levels on standardized tests other than state exams
- Percentage of students requiring English/math remediation in college

Stretch Learning				
Demonstration of rigorous and relevant learning beyond minimum requirements (e.g., achievement/participation in higher level courses, specialized courses)				
Data Indicator	School Performance	Disaggregated	Sustained	Benchmarked

Sample Data Indicators

K-8

- Students make more than one year's growth in literacy
- Interdisciplinary work and projects (problem-based learning)

- Students participate in enrichment courses (music, art, physical education, etc.)
- Completion of three or more years of foreign language before grade 6

9-12

- Interdisciplinary work and projects (e.g., senior exhibition)
- Average number of college credits earned by graduation (dual enrollment)
- Percent of students completing career majors or career/technical education programs
- Achievement of specialized certificates (e.g., Microsoft, Cisco Academy)

Learner Engagement				
The extent to which learners (1) are motivated and committed to learning, (2) have a sense of belonging and accomplishment, and (3) have relationships with adults, peers, and parents that support learning.				
Data Indicator	School Performance	Disaggregated	Sustained	Benchmarked

Sample Data Indicators

K-8

- Student satisfaction surveys
- Student risk behaviors (asset survey)
- Surveys on degree to which teachers know their students
- Student participation in classroom and school leadership (Junior Leadership Team, etc.)

9-12

- Student satisfaction surveys
- Student risk behaviors (asset survey)
- Dropout rate
- Attendance rate

Personal Skill Development				
(1) Measures of personal, social, service, and leadership skills, and (2) demonstrations of positive behaviors and attitudes.				
Data Indicator	School Performance	Disaggregated	Sustained	Benchmarked

Sample Data Indicators

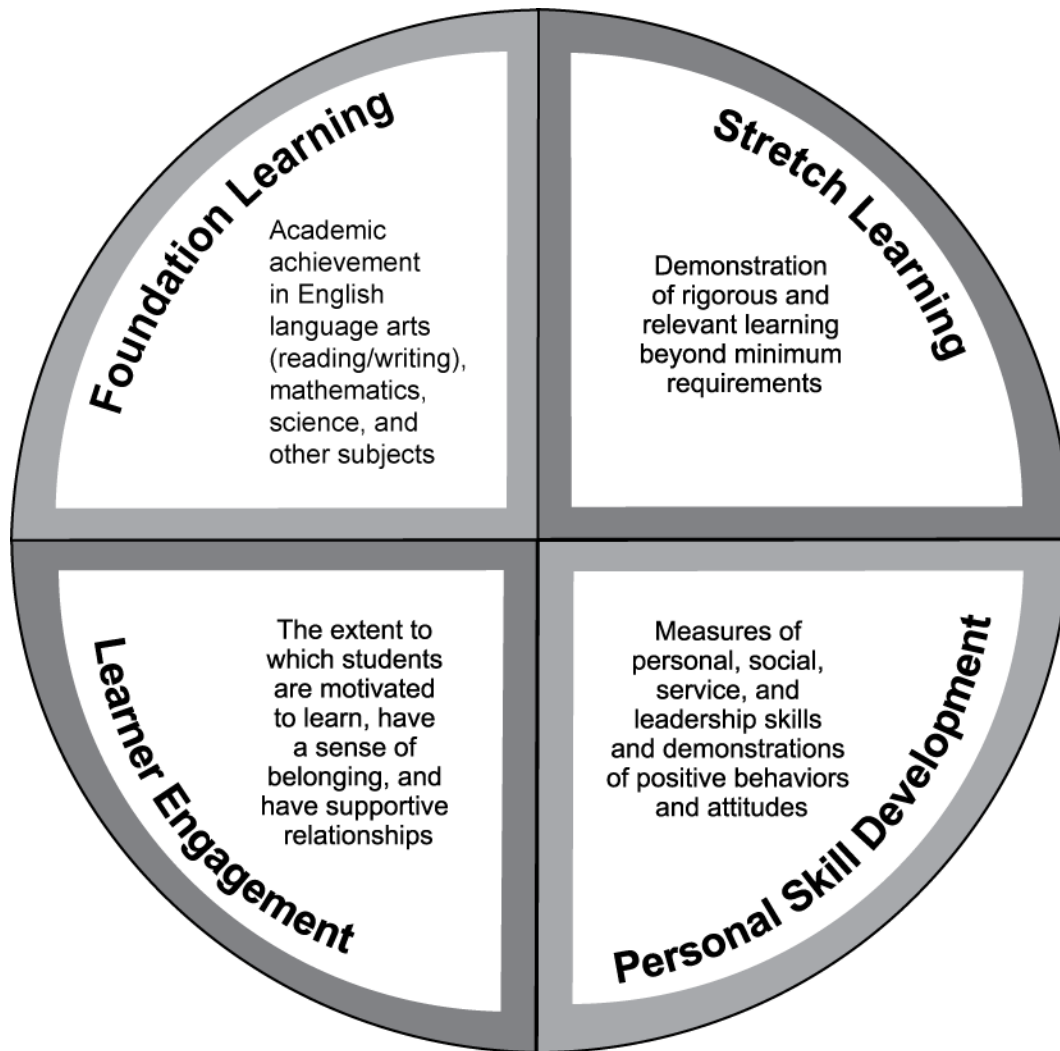
K-8

- Students holding leadership position in clubs, classrooms, sports, etc.
- Assessment of personal skills, such as time management, planning/organizing work, working as a member of a team, conflict resolution
- Follow-up survey of middle school students on development of personal skills

9-12

- Participation or hours in service learning
- Students holding leadership positions in clubs or sports
- Assessment of skills in time management, organizing work, leadership/followership, working as a member of a team, conflict resolution
- Follow-up survey of graduates on development of personal skills

Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners



The following organizations participated in the development of the Learning Criteria: Achieve, Inc., American Association of School Administrators (AASA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), American Institutes for Research (AIR), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), Education Trust, International Center for Leadership in Education/Successful Practices Network, National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), National Education Association (NEA), National School Boards Association (NSBA), and U.S. Department of Education.