LEARNING CRITERIA COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

OVERVIEW

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Learning Criteria for Career and College Readiness

The shift to college and career readiness requires multiple data measures

In recent years, conversations about school improvement have stressed "data driven" instruction. This is a positive step toward more analytical, evidence-based and objective decision making by measuring the results of instruction. Unfortunately, the emphasis on becoming data-driven has often focused only on state assessment data. This has led to data-driven instruction that amounts to test rehearsal, where "teaching" becomes test preparation, with students practicing those test questions they have answered incorrectly in practice tests. This is a misplacement of effort on two levels. First, data is based on limited measures. Secondly, a written test of recall becomes the primary definition of success.

The shift to college and career readiness requires multiple data measures that triangulate students' actual achievement and growth in several skills and knowledge areas. Test developers may claim that their commercial assessments offer a single benchmark for college and career readiness, but educators know that true readiness is more complex than any one measure. Gauging college and career readiness involves using more measures of achievement than just the results on a test taken on one day.

Measurement drives instruction! Typically, our education system measures what is convenient, such as recall of facts via multiple-choice test items, rather than what is important, such as student understanding as demonstrated through a research project and presentation. When measurement is based on a single assessment, it results in limited instruction — and ultimately incomplete evidence for making important decisions about students. When measurement is broad, it is more likely to support a rich and diverse learning environment. Good measurement will drive good decisions about teaching and learning.

Schools must pay attention to state accountability measures, but should not be limited by them. Educators need to make a concerted effort to agree on broader ways to measure student growth and success that reflect the school community's core beliefs about student learning and college and career readiness.

The Successful Practices Network (SPN) white paper, "Leadership for College and Career Readiness," identifies tens shifts in leadership that must occur to enhance student career readiness. Data is one of the shifts that needs to occur. Schools need to change data-driven instruction to measure what matters if they are to

address college and career readiness effectively.

There is growing public interest in seeking broader ways to measure student performance beyond reading and math test scores. One such initiative that has helped schools achieve more comprehensive measures of student success since 2005 is the Learning Criteria for 21st Century Learners. Now, SPN has updated the Learning Criteria to focus on college and career readiness.

What is the Learning Criteria?

The Learning Criteria for 21st Century Learners originated from a five-year grant to SPN, in partnership with the International Center for Leadership in Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers and with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This project identified, analyzed and disseminated the nation's most successful school-wide practices and policies for achieving a rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students, with a particular focus on classroom instruction and effective learning. The Learning Criteria for 21st Century Learners identified four broad areas of a student's experience in school: *Foundation Learning, Stretch Learning, Personal Skill Development* and *Learner Engagement*. These four areas defined multiple ways to measure the preparation of students for success beyond high school.

Updating the Learning Criteria to Reflect College and Career Readiness

As part of its initiative to develop a Career Readiness Institute, SPN has revised the Learning Criteria to better reflect what it means to prepare students to be career ready as well as college ready. The original Learning Criteria was important in drawing attention to the fact that schools need measures of stretch learning, which requires moving beyond simply meeting minimum requirements as defined by state tests and district/school requirements. The introduction of personal skills along with traditional academic measures (foundation learning) provided a strong basis for designing and

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implementing intentional learning experiences and a culture conducive to increasing emphasis on soft skill development.

The new focus on college and career readiness has led to enhancements to the earlier version of the Learning Criteria for several reasons.

- Schools need to develop some criteria that relate to the development of technical skills. In the structure of the original Learning Criteria, a school might select only academic measures of student learning.
- Learner engagement should not be a separate area on which to assess schools. Rather, learner engagement cuts across all aspects of learning. In fact, the first step in getting students on a path to higher levels of achievement is to teach and support them in a way that increases their engagement in learning.
- Personal skills can be interpreted too narrowly and leave out areas such as interpersonal skills (collaboration and teamwork). There also needs to be specific criteria related to students developing the ability to plan and prepare for future careers and education.

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The renamed and revised Learning Criteria for College and Career Readiness identifies three broad domains of a student's experience in school:

1. **Academic (know)** - Measures of what students know, organized around traditional required subjects of English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies
2. **Performance (do)** - Measures of what students can do including technical, artistic and/or athletic performances
3. **Life/Career Abilities (be)** - Measures of who students are as reflected in their personal skills, interpersonal skills, work habits and career planning skills.

Taken together, these three areas provide guidance for staff and leadership teams to craft learning opportunities that prepare students for success in school, careers

Learning Criteria for College and Career Readiness
Domains and Levels of Student Measures

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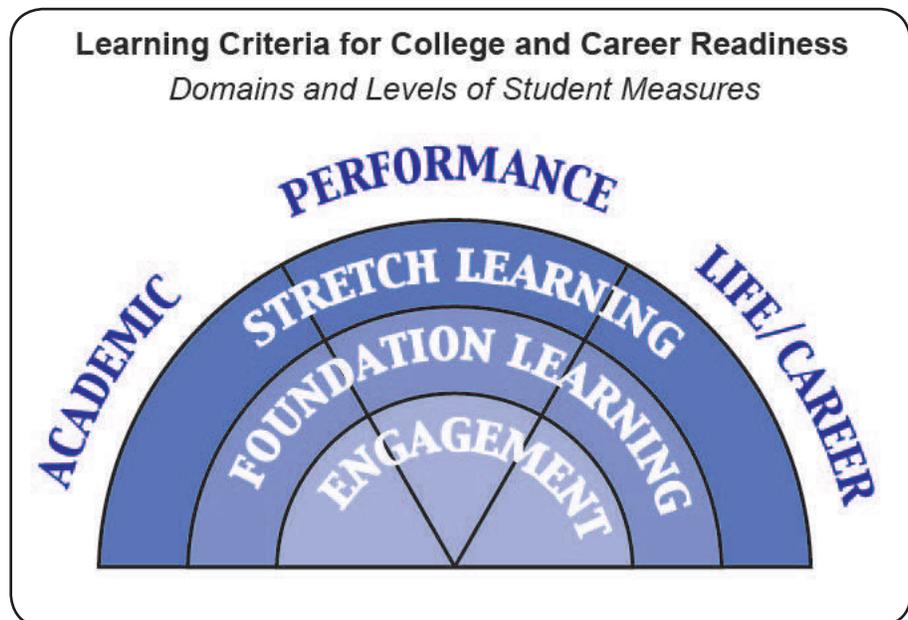
and further education. Thus, the Learning Criteria for College and Career Readiness encourages broadening the traditional academic learning measures to include performance and life/career abilities. This revised Learning Criteria does not neglect the original notion of indicators around learner engagement and stretch learning. Engagement and stretch are now subcategories, or dimensions, in each of the three domains, along with foundation learning.

- **Learner Engagement:** the degree to which students exhibit behaviors and decisions that demonstrate an interest in and commitment to learning
- **Foundation Learning:** core knowledge and skills required of all students as the minimum level of achievement
- **Stretch Learning:** opportunities to extend and enhance learning in areas of students' talents and interests

Figure 1 shows a matrix of nine cells created by the three domains and three dimensions.

Figure 1: Learning Criteria Matrix

Learning Criteria Examples

Figure 2 shows examples of how the three domains and three dimensions define various criteria for student learning. Schools would define several criteria in each cell of the matrix depending on their school goals, student population and grade levels. The examples in the figure are for high school. Defining measures is easier in high school with its wider array of choices; however, elementary and middle schools could develop criteria using the same matrix.

Examples of Learner Engagement are measures that show student interest and commitment to learning. Under Academic Learner Engagement, the college-going rate might be a good data measure, because students who enroll in college show interest in furthering academic learning. In Performance Learner Engagement, a good indicator might be completing a work-based learning experience. Likewise, a Life/Career Learner Engagement measure could be completing a minimum number of service learning hours or credits.

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Foundation Learning includes criteria that represent the minimum level of achievement usually required of students before moving to the next level of school or earning a diploma. A measure of Academic Foundation Learning could be the percentage of students reaching the threshold

Figure 2: Learning Criteria Examples

designated for Career and College Readiness on the state English exam. An example of Performance Foundation Learning might be successful completion of a sequence of courses in either the arts or career and technical education (CTE). Finally, an example of Life/Career Abilities Foundation Learning might be a rating of effective on a locally developed character traits rubric.

Stretch includes those measures that track the percentages of students who achieve more ambitious thresholds targeted by the school. An example of Academic Stretch Learning could be percentage of students achieving the ambitious level of 30 or higher on the ACT exam. An example of a Performance Stretch could be percentage of students earning a CTE endorsed diploma. In Life/Career Abilities Stretch Learning, a school might measure the percentage of students holding a leadership role in a school club or team.

the Learning Criteria can help to guide professional conversations

The nine cells of the Learning Criteria matrix help to remind educators of the balance that needs to occur in a well-rounded education. The Appendix shows an entire example of Learning Criteria indicators for a typical high school. In elementrary and middle schools, a school would have fewer measures but the same structure can be used to defne student learning.

Using the Learning Criteria

The Learning Criteria for College and Career Readiness can be used in multiple ways in schools: First, Learning Criteria fo College and Career Readiness can be used as a guide for school improvement. As a school leadership team focuses on priority needs within the domains, the Learning Criteria can help to guide professional conversations. The team can reflect on the quality of current educational practices and services and identify changes that might be made toward the goal of increasing student achievement.

Secondly, a school or district can use the Learning Criteria as a framework to reflect on its current student learning measures of success and redefine those measures for both the school and individual student reports.

SPN can provide technical assistance to schools interested in using the Learning Criteria for College and Career Readiness and shift the data driven instructional focus. This assistance includes facilitated planning with leadership teams, checklists for self- reflection and sharing Learning Criteria from other schools. Schools that are supporting members of the Career Readiness Institue have access to more extensive resources on the Learning Criteria.

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APPENDIX

Sample High School List of Learning Criteria of College and Career Readiness			
	Academic (Know)	**Performance (Do)**	**Life/Career (Be)**
Learner Engagement	% students taking an AP or IB exam % graduates going to college	% enrolled in one CTE course % graduates completed work-based learning	% missing < 5 days % with career goal in first career plan % with no discipline referrals % graduates completing 50 hours of service learning
Foundation Learning	% meeting state academic assessment benchmarks for college and career readiness in English Language Arts % meeting state academic assessment benchmarks for college and career readiness in Mathematics	% graduates completing 3 or more credits in CTE or the Arts % graduates earning technical certificate	% rating excellent on Character Tratis inventory
Stretch Learning	% graduates achieving 30 or more on ACT % graduates earning diploma with distinction % graduates with 9 college credits by graduation	% graduates with CTE endorsed diploma % graduates presenting senior project	% graduates holding leadership position in club or team