

Educator Preparation and 21st Century Skills: A Blueprint for Change An Initial Look at Key Principles

AACTE Advisory Group and the Strategic Council of the
Partnership for 21st Century Skills

I am urging every teacher education program today to make better outcomes for students the overarching mission that propels all their efforts. America's great educational challenges require that this new generation of well-prepared teachers significantly boost student learning and increase college-readiness. President Obama has set an ambitious goal of having America regain its position as the nation with the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. But to reach that goal, both our K-12 system and our teacher preparation programs have to get dramatically better. The stakes are huge – and the time to cling to the status quo has passed.

– Arne Duncan, October 22, 2009

[The Partnership for 21st Century Skills](#) (P21), in collaboration with the [American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education](#) (AACTE), is currently developing a document entitled *Educator Preparation and 21st Century Skills: A Blueprint for Change*. Presented here are the key concepts explored in this important paper, due for release spring 2010.

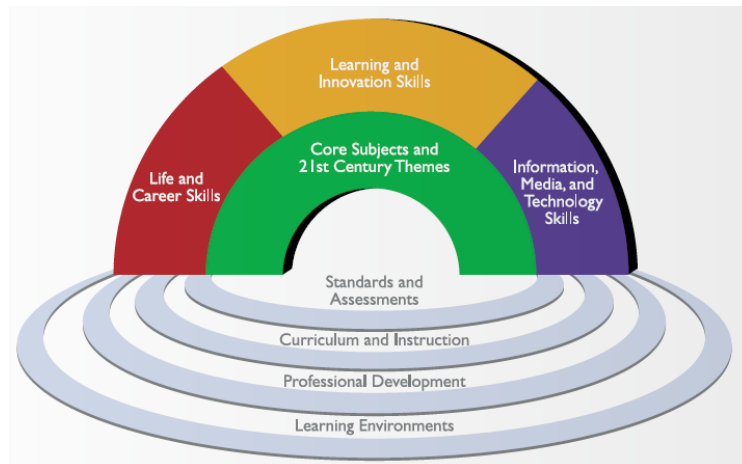
Meeting the Nation's 21st Century Needs

America's ability to compete—and for states, regions, and communities to attract growth industries and create quality job opportunities—depends on the ingenuity, agility, and skills of its people. Today as never before, meeting the nation's challenges demands educational excellence. Reinvigorating the economy, achieving energy independence with alternative technologies, and strengthening the health care system require a skilled workforce that is ready for the critical job ahead.

There is widespread consensus, however, that U.S. education and workforce development systems are failing to adequately prepare all students and workers with the essential skills necessary for success in a global economy. A fresh approach to education is needed that recalibrates workforce preparation to the demands of a 21st century economy built on information, knowledge, innovation, and creativity. If the U.S. is to be a successful player in the global economy, the country must be competitive and its young people must be productive individuals in their communities and workplaces.

A 21st century education system must deliver graduates who can effectively compete in a global economy. Creating such an education system will invigorate educators and students, and inspire teaching and learning that are relevant and responsive to national needs.

A Framework for 21st Century Skills Learning



The rainbow above represents student outcomes: the skills, knowledge and expertise students should master to succeed in work and life. The pools below represent the systems needed to support such learning.

P21 and its member organizations have developed a coherent vision for learning to strengthen American education. This “Framework for 21st Century Learning” encompasses the skills, knowledge, and expertise students must master to succeed in work and life. High school graduates will be far more prepared to thrive in today’s global economy when school districts apply the Framework to professional development, assessments, and standards.

This collection of knowledge and skills represents the necessary student outcomes for success:

- Mastery of core subjects, as well as 21st century themes, such as global awareness, financial literacy, and environmental literacy
- Learning and innovation skills, such as creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving
- Information, media, and technology skills
- Life and career skills, such as initiative and self-direction

Leaders in the educator preparation field have a unique opportunity – and a profound obligation – to establish the vision for their programs that will result in a 21st century educator workforce that produces the student outcomes outlined in the Framework for 21st Century Skills Learning. The Blueprint will summarize the challenges and opportunities that will lead to greater success and competitiveness, not only for our children and our educators, but for our nation as a whole.

Core Principles

The AACTE advisory group and the strategic council of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills have approved the following core principles, representing a shared vision for integrating 21st century skills into educator preparation:

- K-12 education will prepare all students with 21st century skills and knowledge.
- Colleges of education will prepare their graduates to possess, lead, teach, and assess 21st century skills and knowledge.
- Higher education will work with K-12 and business communities to inform the redesign of teacher preparation curricula to more effectively meet the needs of 21st century learners.
- K-12 teachers and administrators will possess, lead, teach, and assess 21st century skills and knowledge.
- Each college of education will adopt a 21st century blueprint for transforming itself into a 21st century school of education.
- Schools of education will be leaders in developing 21st century education and learning strategies.
- Schools of education will be at the forefront of research and evaluation of 21st century education progress and effectiveness.

Action Strategies for Change

Now is an incredibly important time for leaders in the educator preparation field to ensure that all educators have the knowledge and skills required to deliver on the promise of a strong, relevant education. Areas where attention must be focused include:

- **Leadership:** Leadership teams must establish a clear vision, communicating clearly that core academic subject mastery and 21st century skills are the “design specs” for their programs.
- **Program Design and Instructional Models:** Educator preparation programs play an important role in developing greater understanding among teacher candidates about the need for curricula and practices that address content and skills. These programs must also incorporate methods for developing each educator’s capacity to learn, practice, and refine instruction for improved student outcomes. This can be accomplished by adopting instructional models that emphasize classroom practices that researchers and educators believe best support 21st century skills learning. A coherent “line of sight” should link preservice teacher program design to the curricula of their future students.
- **Learning Environments:** Educator preparation leaders have a unique opportunity to develop consensus on the next generation of learning environments. Teachers and students must move from isolation to connection; professional learning communities and peer coaching will ensure the long-term practice of continuous development through collaboration with colleagues. Key factors include the integration of flexible units of time in programs that support project-based work, interdisciplinary instruction, and competency-based measures of student progress.
- **Partnerships:** Educator preparation programs should partner in ways that reinforce skills and knowledge outcomes among candidates. Programs should focus on building productive, collaborative relationships across colleges within universities, with P-12 schools, with professional development schools, and with community stakeholders and leaders from business, professional associations, and local educational organizations.

- **Accountability and Assessment:** The assessment strategies used in educator preparation programs, which include the measurement of teacher candidates' mastery of 21st century teaching skills, will contribute greatly to candidates' capacity to model these practices in their future classrooms. Teacher preparation leaders should consider how their programs can play a role in developing and cultivating future teacher-leaders who understand and promote best practices in assessment of 21st century skills.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Effective 21st century knowledge and skills initiatives in educator preparation will ensure continuous improvement by tracking the success of teacher candidates over time.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education welcome Summit participants' input and recommendations as development continues on the Blueprint for Change for schools of education and all providers of teacher preparation.

Key Questions

- What do we need to do as a nation to ensure that our students graduate with the skills and knowledge they need for success in the 21st century?
- What capabilities and skills do prospective teachers need to be able to teach and assess these skills?
- What are the key principles for integrating 21st century skills into educator preparation programs?

Contacts

Partnership for 21st Century Skills
Valerie Greenhill, vgreenhill@eluminategroup.com

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
Susan Petroff, spetroff@aaacte.org

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