

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

a briefing series for new england's educational leaders

I Want to Know More

A *Leadership in Action* Supplement

I Want to Know More is a selection of information and resources for education leaders, parents, elected representatives, and community members who are interested in knowing more about what students could be learning in today's high schools.

What Do Today's Students Need to Know?

It's a complex question. And complex questions never have easy answers. But over the past several decades, the world's best high schools and teachers have been showing us the way. All successful schools, for example, hold students to high academic expectations, and then back up those expectations with great teaching in every classroom. Challenging students to exceed their past performance, overcome negative self-images, tackle complex problems, and aspire to rewarding educational, career, and life opportunities not only leads to higher test scores and graduation rates, but to more energized school cultures and more fulfilling professional experiences for teachers.

Real-World Skills: What Are They—and Why Are They Important?

More and more educators, experts, and employers agree that the ability to communicate effectively, solve complex problems, speak compellingly in public, collaborate productively in a group, and master sophisticated technological tools are the vitally important skills that will define success, employability, and competitiveness in the 21st century.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (www.p21.org) is a national organization that advocates for relevant, real-world skills in the classroom—skills that address what students actually need to know and be able to do as adults. The organization's *21st Century Skill Maps*, for example, provide practical guidance for high school teachers looking to incorporate these real-world skills into their lessons and instruction. To download the skill maps, go to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills website, click *Tools and Resources*, then click *Publications*, and scroll down to *21st Century Skill Maps*.

Something to Think About

Tony Wagner, author of *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need—And What We Can Do About It*, has pointed to two particularly revealing studies: surveys of college professors and surveys of employers. Wagner sees a remarkable overlap in what professors want incoming students to know and the skills that employers want new hires to possess—for example, strong oral and written communication skills, leadership and organizational abilities, teamwork and collaboration skills, a strong work ethic, the ability to think critically and analyze problems, and mastery of technological applications are among the high-demand skills that consistently rise to the top. And yet these are the very skills that college freshmen and young workers consistently lack. Wagner suggests that if we want to know what adolescents should be learning in our high schools, we should listen to the people who will be teaching them, preparing them, and employing them after they graduate.

Edutopia: Illustrating New Ways of Learning

Edutopia (www.edutopia.com) is a rich website and video archive devoted to profiling new ways of schooling. The online resource, which is funded by the George Lucas Educational Foundation, provides an abundance of information about effective teaching and learning strategies in the 21st century. On the homepage, select *Browse By Grade Level* or *Core Strategies* for detailed information on courses, lessons, and instructional techniques, or select *Videos* or *Schools That Work* for short documentaries and profiles of schools and teachers at the forefront of educational innovation.

College Knowledge: Preparing Students for Postsecondary Success

The Knowledge and Skills for University Success standards (www.sccollegereadiness.com/KSUS.htm), a project conducted by David T. Conley and the Educational Policy Improvement Center, identified the foundational knowledge and skills that students should learn to succeed in higher education. The project's Standards for Success Work Samples (www.epiconline.org/publications/college_readiness) "demonstrate the quality of work students are expected to produce to be successful in entry-level university courses." High school teachers can reference the work samples when designing courses and lessons intended to prepare students for college-level work.

The following list—adapted from David Conley's book, *College Knowledge*—constitutes some of the core skills that are essential to postsecondary success:

- Critical thinking, problem solving, and analytical skills
- An inquisitive and curious nature
- A receptivity to critical feedback and a willingness to act on it
- An ability to accept failure and learn from it
- An ability to make persuasive and articulate written and oral arguments
- The ability to weigh sources for credibility and relative importance
- The ability to use technology to enhance learning
- The capacity to draw independent inferences and reach conclusions

Visit www.epiconline.org/college_ready_resources for more college-ready resources and information from David Conley and the Educational Policy Improvement at the University of Oregon.

Global Literacy: Internationalizing Teaching and Learning

In today's world, national borders no longer define the knowledge and skills that students need to succeed—and the education we provide in our high schools needs to prepare students for success in a competitive global economy. The Asia Society website (www.asiasociety.org/education-learning) is a rich repository of writing and resources that help educators bring a more global perspective to their teaching. *Learning with the World* (www.asiasociety.org/education-learning/learning-world) and *Resources for Schools* (www.asiasociety.org/education-learning/resources-schools) are two sections that provide tangible examples of international learning for teachers, parents, and community members.

The Learning Network: Lessons from the Real World

One of America's most widely read newspapers recently launched a new educational service called the Learning Network: Teaching and Learning with *The New York Times* (www.learning.blogs.nytimes.com). A description from the website provides a compelling description of the service:

Every weekday we offer new educational resources based on the articles, photographs, videos, illustrations, podcasts and graphics published in The New York Times—all for free.

We invite parents, teachers and students who are 13 and older to use our ideas and tools. We hope that through posting your comments you'll become part of an ongoing conversation about teaching and learning.

Each Learning Network installment gives educators a detailed lesson plan to follow, including required materials, links to relevant articles and videos, framing questions, suggested activities, and the specific learning standards the lesson addresses. This free online service is helping to make high school learning more relevant by promoting lessons that are based on current events and the world's most challenging problems.

Still Want to Know More?

If you are interested in the foundational research behind many of the ideas discussed in the Leadership in Action series, we recommend our *Global Best Practices Research Summary*, which is available on the New England Secondary School Consortium website: www.newenglandssc.org/resources/publications.