

# STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

**HEARING TYPE:**      X   ACTION

**DATE:**            **September 18-19, 2007**

**SUBJECT:**         **Meaningful High School Diploma Policy Questions**

**SERVICE UNIT:**    Ms. Edie Harding, Executive Director  
                          State Board of Education

**PRESENTERS:**     Eric Liu, Board Lead  
                          State Board of Education

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                          State Board of Education

## **BACKGROUND:**

This paper provides background to assist the Board in moving forward with its meaningful high school diploma work. It is intended to be a catalyst for discussion of three key policy questions:

1. What is the purpose of a diploma?
2. Does the purpose of a diploma apply to all students?
3. What guiding principles will shape the Board's decisions about the content of diploma requirements and the methods used to measure student performance?

One of the Board's tasks is to propose a revised definition of a diploma to the legislature by December 1, 2007. Staff is seeking preliminary agreement on answers to these questions—agreements that will provide the basis for an outreach initiative this fall to elicit input from the public. In November, the Board will have an opportunity to consider that input, and deepen and refine its perspectives before responding to the legislature.



**Washington State Board of Education  
Meaningful High School Diploma  
Staff Recommendations September 6, 2007**

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**LEGISLATION**

The legislation<sup>1</sup> directs the Board as follows:

The State Board of Education shall develop and propose a revised definition of the purpose and expectations for high school diplomas issued by public schools in Washington state. The revised definition shall address whether attainment of a high school diploma is intended to signify that a student is ready for success in college, ready for successful and gainful employment in the workplace, or some combination of these and other objectives. The revised definition shall focus on the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students are expected to demonstrate to receive a high school diploma, as well as the various methods to be used to measure student performance, rather than focusing on courses, credits, seat time, and test scores.

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<sup>1</sup> E2SHB 3098

## POLICY QUESTIONS

### Policy Question #1: What is the purpose of a diploma?

The legislation prompts the Board to consider three issues:

1. Should a diploma signify that a student is ready for success in college?
2. Should a diploma signify that a student is ready for successful and gainful employment in the workplace?
3. What other objective might a diploma meet?

The Board has already established an overall goal to guide its work: *Prepare all Washington state students for the opportunity to succeed in postsecondary education, the 21st century world of work, and citizenship.* The language of the goal suggests that the Board's answer to the first two questions outlined above would be "yes" and suggests, in response to question #3, that preparation for citizenship would be a third objective.

**Staff recommendation:** A diploma is intended to signify that a student is ready for success in postsecondary education, ready for successful and gainful employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace, and ready to assume the responsibilities of a participating member of a democratic society.

### Policy Question #2: Does the purpose of a diploma apply to all students?

A decision on whether the purpose of the diploma is the same for all students will determine whether all students will be held to the same state-determined graduation requirements.

In an earlier paper prepared by staff and distributed to the Board, the status of differentiated diplomas nationally and in the state was explored. In that paper, it was noted that in Washington, school districts "issue diplomas to students signifying graduation from high school upon the students' satisfactory completion of all local and state graduation requirements." By law, *only* school districts and community and technical colleges may issue a high school diploma.<sup>2</sup> However, the Board sets the minimum graduation requirements required for students to earn those diplomas. Given

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<sup>2</sup> (RCW 28A.230.120); (RCW 28B.50.535)

this authority, the Board could set graduation requirements and designate them for particular kinds of diplomas.<sup>3</sup>

A policy recommendation to move the state toward a differentiated diploma would need to consider what purpose the diploma would serve, and balance the value of that purpose against potentially negative consequences. Washington has cautiously explored, and then ultimately discarded the idea of differentiation in the past. For instance, the Legislature moved away from a form of differentiation by discontinuing the scholar designation on students' transcripts in 2007. Similarly, for a short period of time, students' WASL scores were placed on the transcript, but that practice was discontinued, as well.

Proponents of a differentiated diploma for Washington might argue:

- Differentiated diplomas that honor career and technical achievement provide public validity and recognition to students who pursue rigorous career and technical preparation.
- Differentiated diplomas can be a way of holding all students to high standards, while recognizing that there are multiple pathways to achievement.
- Differentiated diplomas that recognize academic or career and technical achievement provide motivation to students to pursue more rigorous curricular paths. (However, research evidence to support this assertion is limited to non-existent).

Detractors might assert:

- Differentiated diplomas that recognize career and technical achievements separately from academic achievements may have the unintended consequences of encouraging "tracking," diverting students who might otherwise head down a college preparatory path.
- A diploma is a diploma is a diploma. Most people outside education simply want to know if a student has earned a high school diploma. Anything else is confusing and inconsequential.
- Differentiated diplomas reinforce a false dichotomy of workplace readiness vs. college readiness and send mixed signals to students about what they need to succeed after high school.

The Meaningful High School Committee considered and declined to pursue a path of differentiated diplomas, preferring to focus instead on determining what core requirements were needed for all students to be successful.

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<sup>3</sup> The 23 states with some form of differentiation employ a variety of strategies: multiple diplomas, endorsements on diplomas, endorsements on transcripts and certificates separate from diplomas. Five states (Arkansas, Indiana, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas) have "opt-out" policies that permit students to pursue a less rigorous curriculum.

**Staff Recommendation:** The purpose and expectations of a diploma apply to all students.

**Policy Question #3: What guiding principles will shape the Board’s decisions about the content of diploma requirements and the methods used to measure student performance?**

Ultimately, the Board will need to make decisions about the exact content of graduation requirements, and that is where the tough questions the Board has already started to grapple with will emerge. The preliminary recommendations submitted in July reflected the Meaningful High School Diploma Committee’s first cut at these very difficult questions. Keep the same subjects that are currently required? Add subjects? Take some away? Narrow down to essentials? If so, which ones? What’s missing? What’s needed? What’s working? What isn’t?

And when the recommendations are finally completed, the Board will need to explain why—why *these* recommendations, for *this* time, for *our* students.

As the Board moves forward to consider graduation requirements and the strategies that will be needed to implement them, an agreed-upon set of guiding principles will serve as a point of reference—an anchor that will keep the focus on what matters.

**Work to date.** The seeds for many of the proposed principles have been evolving from the work of the MHSD Committee and its advisory group. The Committee discussed the importance of diploma requirements that would provide broad preparation to keep doors open for students after high school. The Committee thought graduates should have as many options open as possible, and as few foreclosed—for pathways are rarely straight and clear. Every student should be equipped with certain content areas and life skills to keep as many options open as possible after graduation.

The Committee also recognized that motivation and personal understanding are central to making high school meaningful, and relevance is key to motivation. Students need to be exposed to a variety of ways to learn. Similarly, a variety of ways to learn need to be accepted as viable pathways.

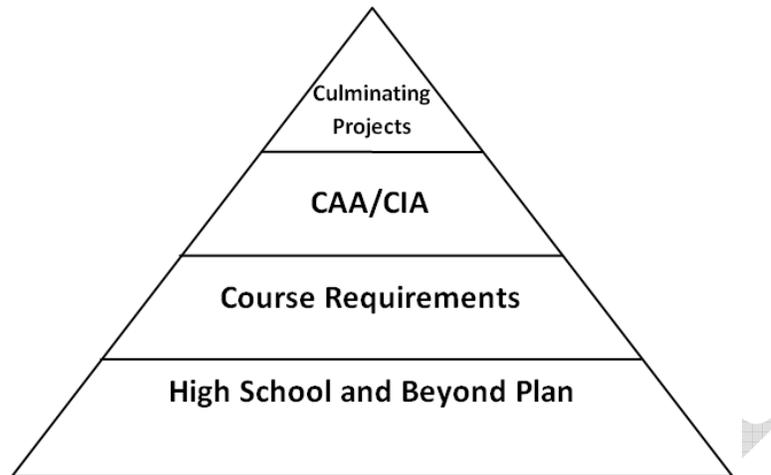
The Board has already established multiple methods for students to develop and demonstrate skills. In addition to earning 19 credits, the Board has required students to complete a High School and Beyond Plan and a Culminating Project, effective for all students beginning with the class of 2008. The MHSD Committee discussed the value of a full range of diploma requirements, and endorsed the High School and Beyond Plan and the Culminating Project for helping to ensure that students have many ways to pursue their interests. Similarly, students need a diversity of ways to demonstrate their

performance, both to address skills that are difficult to assess and to engage students more deeply in shaping their education and directing their learning.

**Guiding principles:** Six guiding principles emerge from the work to date and are brought forward for the Board to discuss, refine, and, if acceptable, endorse.

- 1. Endorse graduation requirements that broaden a student's experiences.** High school provides an opportunity for students to discover their interests by exploring a variety of subjects and to be exposed to the lenses through which different disciplines see the world (e.g., an historian's view of a world event may differ from the scientist's view of that same event). For this reason, high school graduation requirements should broaden, not narrow, students' experiences by encompassing a wide range of disciplines and experiences.
- 2. Balance prescription with flexibility to increase opportunities for students to pursue multiple pathways to earn a diploma.** The structure of graduation requirements should support, and not preclude, different courses of study. It should be possible for a student to pursue advanced placement courses, career and technical education courses—or both. Local decisions to cross-reference and cross-credit courses give students greater flexibility to pursue their goals in ways that most interest them.
- 3. Seek ways to expand opportunities to meet graduation requirements before high school.** For many students, middle school doesn't "count," in the sense that credits or grades earned in middle school aren't reported on a transcript. Finding meaningful ways to help students prepare for high school and connect middle and high school learning could ease the eighth/ninth grade transition, increase motivation and provide more flexibility of choice when students reach high school. Beginning work on the High School and Beyond Plan, taking courses that earn high school credit, or demonstrating proficiency on an essential skill are three examples of ways to make these connections.

4. **Strengthen and integrate the High School and Beyond Plan and Culminating Project so that students see all of the graduation requirements as one coherent whole.**



5. **Consider ways to increase opportunities for competency-based learning.** Competency-based learning requires a foundation of clear content and performance standards, reliable and valid assessment measures, and systems to monitor and record progress. It also requires a system that supports students and schools to earn credit through competency without jeopardizing school funding or taxing school resources unduly.
6. **Select a framework that will serve as a guide for the work of choosing diploma requirements.** Frameworks are established structures that provide a basis for comparison—touchstones against which to judge the adequacy of an approach. Frameworks are not definitive prescriptions and may, in fact, be incomplete. Still, they are guides that provide a structure and a rationale for decision making. As the Board considers the knowledge, skills and abilities students are expected to demonstrate, it may want to align fully or partially with graduation requirements recommended by credit-driven frameworks or skills-based frameworks. Examples of different types of frameworks are included in Appendix A.

**Staff Recommendation:** Endorse the guiding principles as a means to shape the Board's decisions about the content of diploma requirements and the methods used to measure student performance.

## WORK PLAN AND NEXT STEPS

Decisions about the purpose, application, and guiding principles made at the September meeting will set the stage for public engagement on the meaning of a diploma—what it signifies, and what hopes and dreams it represents. That input, gathered this fall, along with the policy decisions the Board makes in response to the questions posed in this paper, will provide guidance to staff for the short-term work of developing the definition of a diploma and for the longer-term work of establishing revised graduation requirements.

The Board has a total of four MHSD-related tasks due by December 1. Staff will consult with Board members to move the work forward expeditiously on all of the tasks with imminent deadlines. Following is a proposed work plan with an outline of tasks, due dates, key action steps, and approximate timetable.

### Meaningful High School Diploma Proposed Work Plan

Task	Due Date	Key Action Steps	Target Dates
Propose a revised definition of a diploma to legislature	December 1, 2007	Review draft purpose statement	September 2007
		Elicit public input	Fall 2007
		Review and approve final definition	November 2007
Reach a decision on Tribal history, culture, and government as a graduation requirement	December 1, 2007	Meet with Tribal Leader Congress	August 2007
		Meet with Tribal representatives	October 2007
		Hear from Tribal leader(s) at November Board meeting	November 2007
Increase math credits from 2 to 3 and prescribe content	December 1, 2007	Contract with external consultant to study and recommend math content	September-November 2007
		Consider recommendations and decide on content	October/November 2007
Evaluate graduation requirements for students in CTE programs	December 1, 2007	Contract with external consultant to analyze available data on CTE completers and graduation	September 2007
		Visit selected CTE programs	September/October 2007
		Review preliminary findings	November 2007

<b>Task</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Key Action Steps</b>	<b>Target Dates</b>
Recommend revised graduation requirements	July 2008	Revise proposed recommendations	November 2007
		Vet recommendations with interest groups/stakeholders (subject-specific groups, teachers, principals, school directors, parents, students, business)	November 2007 – March 2008
		Revise proposed recommendations	May 2008
		Approve final recommendations	July 2008
Consider adopting a rule that would reinstate the math WASL requirement for the CAA for the class of 2012	September 1, 2008	Formally declare intent to review reinstatement of math WASL by filing code revision notice	March 2008
		Hold public hearing	May 2008
		Make decision on reinstatement	July 2008

## Frameworks for Comparison

Following are examples of three prominent, credit-based frameworks the Board might use to guide decisions about the content of graduation requirements. These frameworks provide a rationale for the selection of requirements and signal to the public key values that are driving decisions. Their usefulness is primarily as a point of reference. *Alignment with any one of them can be full or partial.*

**Postsecondary education and work readiness convergence.** Does the Board want to align with the graduation requirement standards of frameworks that assert the convergence of postsecondary education and work readiness skills? Considerable research has been conducted nationally by organizations such as the Southern Regional Education Board's High Schools That Work program<sup>4</sup>, ACT<sup>5</sup>, and Achieve's American Diploma Project (ADP)<sup>6</sup> to determine where college and work ready skills overlap. All recommend very similar curriculum standards in core subject areas and prescribe math content. The ADP and ACT have both produced English and mathematics knowledge and skills standards. In addition, Achieve has identified 13 states that currently have college and work ready standards.<sup>7</sup> (see table later in Appendix A).

**College admissions.** Does the Board want to align with the graduation requirement standards needed for admission to Washington's public four-year colleges? The Higher Education Coordinating Board recently updated the *minimum* College Admission Distribution Requirements (CADRs) that all students must meet in order to be admitted to public, four-year colleges in our state. Not all students may choose to attend a four-year institution or to attend college at all; the operative question would need to be, do the CADRs represent a standard all students should meet?

**Global Challenge States.** Does the Board want to align with the graduation requirement standards of the Global Challenge States? Washington Learns, the Governor-appointed committee that studied Washington's education system and recommended changes needed to build a world-class, learner-centered, seamless education system, suggested that Washington benchmark performance against the Global Challenge States<sup>8</sup>. In addition to Washington, five of the Global Challenge States (California, Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia) have state-mandated high school graduation requirements; Washington could use those states' requirements as a point of reference.

<sup>4</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2006). Getting Students Ready for College and Careers.

<sup>5</sup> ACT, Inc. (2006). Ready for College and Ready for Work:: Same or Different? ACT Policy Report. (2005). Courses Count: Preparing Students for Postsecondary Success.

<sup>6</sup> The American Diploma Project (2004). Ready or Not—Creating a High School Diploma That Counts. Achieve, Inc.; American Diploma Project Network.

<sup>7</sup> American Diploma Project Network. Closing the Expectations Gap 2007. Achieve, Inc. p. 10

<sup>8</sup> The Global Challenge States are the eight top performers on the New Economy Index, a scale that compares states on 21 indicators that measure how well they are positioned to compete in the new economy.

**Summary of credit-based frameworks.** Both the convergence and college admissions frameworks specify math through Algebra II or Integrated Math III. Math requirements in the Global Challenge States vary, with some unspecified, and others naming Algebra I and geometry. The following summary table compares the credit requirements of the various frameworks against current Washington graduation requirements. Electives are not included in the table. One limitation of these particular frameworks is that none of them address physical education or career and technical education; consideration of these subjects would need to be addressed separately.

**Comparison of Washington Requirements to Three Credit-based Curriculum Frameworks**

	Eng.	Math	Science	Soc. St.	Arts	World Lang.	PE	CTE
Current Washington Graduation Requirements (non-elective)	3	2	2 (one lab)	2.5	1	0	2	1
<b>Possible Frameworks</b>								
Convergence of postsecondary education & work readiness	4	4	3	3		1-2		
Washington College Admissions	4	3 (one in senior year)	2 (both lab)	3	1 (or other core subj.)	2		
Global Challenge States	4	3	3	3	1	1-2		

Note: Numbers have been averaged for the 5 Global Challenge states with state-mandated requirements and rounded to the nearest whole number.

### Skills-based Frameworks

The Meaningful High School Diploma Committee proposed an initial set of essential/lifelong learning skills the Board might consider for high school graduation requirements. The legislation also asks the Board specifically to consider knowledge, skills and abilities beyond credits and courses. Following are examples of two frameworks that speak directly to skills and provide specific guidance for thinking about the types of skills students may need in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.** The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills provides a framework for categorizing essential knowledge, skills, and abilities students may need to prepare for success in postsecondary education, the workplace, and citizenship. Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, an organization of private businesses and education foundations, advocates for “21<sup>st</sup> century student outcomes”--the “skills, knowledge and expertise students should master to succeed in work and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

**Equipped for the Future.** The National Center for Literacy Equipped for the Future (EFF) initiative began in 1994. It is a “national, standards-based educational improvement initiative for adult basic education and English language learning.” The organization has produced a national work readiness credential that establishes the skills needed for entry-level work, as well as standards that describe what adults do when they are effective in carrying out three primary roles in everyday life--citizen/community member, worker, and parent/family member.

These skill-based frameworks are summarized in the table below.

### Summary of Two Skills-based Frameworks

Framework	Areas of Focus
Partnership for 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Skills	Focuses on skills needed by students in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century, including mastery of core subjects integrated with themes: global awareness, civic literacy, health literacy, and financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy; life and career skills; learning and innovation skills; information, media and technology skills
Equipped for the Future	Focuses on skill areas needed in everyday adult life to become an effective citizen, worker, and family member. Organized around skills of communication, interpersonal, decision making and lifelong learning.

Resource tables and information about the frameworks are on the following pages.

## High School Recommended or Mandatory Graduation Requirements for a Standard Diploma for the Class of 2008 and Beyond—Global Challenge States

State	Math	Type of Math	English	Social Studies	Science	Arts	World Language	PE	Elective	Comp. Tech	Voc Ed Career	Notes	Total
California	2	Algebra I	3	3	2	1 (or world lang)	1 (or arts)	2	0	0	0	State-mandated	13
Colorado	0		0	.5 (incl. hist. of minorities)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Locally-determined	.5
Connecticut	3	Not specified	4	3	2	1 (or voc)	0	1	0	0	1 (or arts)	6 credits Determined locally	20
Maryland	3	Algebra I/data analysis; geometry	4	3	3 (2 lab)	1	2 (world lang, adv tech, or CE)	1	3	1 + 2 world lang, adv tech, or CE)	2 (world lang, adv tech, or CE)	State-mandated	21
Massachusetts	4	See note	4	3	3 (lab)	0	2	2	6	0	0	Voluntary curriculum	24*
New Jersey	3	Not specified	4	3	3	1	1	.75	6	0	0	State-mandated	22
Virginia	3	See note	4	3	3 (lab)	1	0	2	6	0	0	State-mandated	22
Washington	2	Not specified	3	2.5	2	1	0	2	5.5	0	1	State-mandated	19

**Note: Massachusetts:** Massachusetts is recommending a voluntary set of requirements called the MassCore, effective with the class of 2009. The MassCore will recommend that students complete math through Algebra II and take a math course in their senior year. **Virginia:** Virginia has differentiated diplomas. To earn a standard diploma, students must complete 22 credits, of which 6 must be verified externally, either through end-of-course assessments or through other assessments approved by the Board. Courses completed to satisfy the math requirement must be at or above the level of algebra and include at least two course selections from among: Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, or other mathematics courses above the level of algebra and geometry. *Shaded rows represent American Diploma Project Network states.*

## As States Raise High School Graduation Requirements in Math, Do Other Subjects Get Squeezed from the Curriculum?

Each of the 13 states that have raised graduation course requirements to the level recommended by ADP has raised the requirements primarily in math because deficiencies in high school graduates' math performance are most glaring to employers and postsecondary institutions. Many also have raised requirements in science. None of the states has cut back on requirements in the humanities to make room for more math and science. Because students need a well-rounded education, each of these states also established course-taking requirements in English, history/social studies and civics, and most specify requirements in foreign languages and the arts.

### College- and Work-Ready High School Graduation Course Requirements

	AR	DE	IN	KY	MI	MN	MS	NM	NY	OH	OK	SD	TX
English	4.5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.5
Mathematics (including Algebra II)	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	3	3	4
Science	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	4
Social studies	3	3	3	3	3	3.5	4	3.5	4	3	3	4	4
Fine arts	0.5	0		1	1	1	1	0	1		1	1	1
Foreign language	0	2	7	0	2	0	0		1	6			2
Career, electives and other courses	7	8		8	1	7	7	9.5	6		9	7	6.5
Total required courses	22	24	20	22	18	21.5	24	24	22	20	23	22	26
Year raised or first referenced	2010	2011	2011	2012	2016	2015	2012	2013	2010	2014	2010	2010	2011

Source: Achieve Survey/Research, 2007

\* States approach elective requirements in a variety of ways. They may specify that students complete electives chosen from a set of prescribed courses or subjects that in some states includes fine arts and foreign language. They also may bundle electives into various course sequences or concentrations from which students choose. Finally, states simply may require students to take a number of electives without any structure of specificity. A number of states combine these options, requiring several prescribed elective courses or a choice from among several elective concentrations, while also providing students with flexibility in how they fulfill the remaining electives.

"Other courses" include health, physical education and other required non-academic courses.

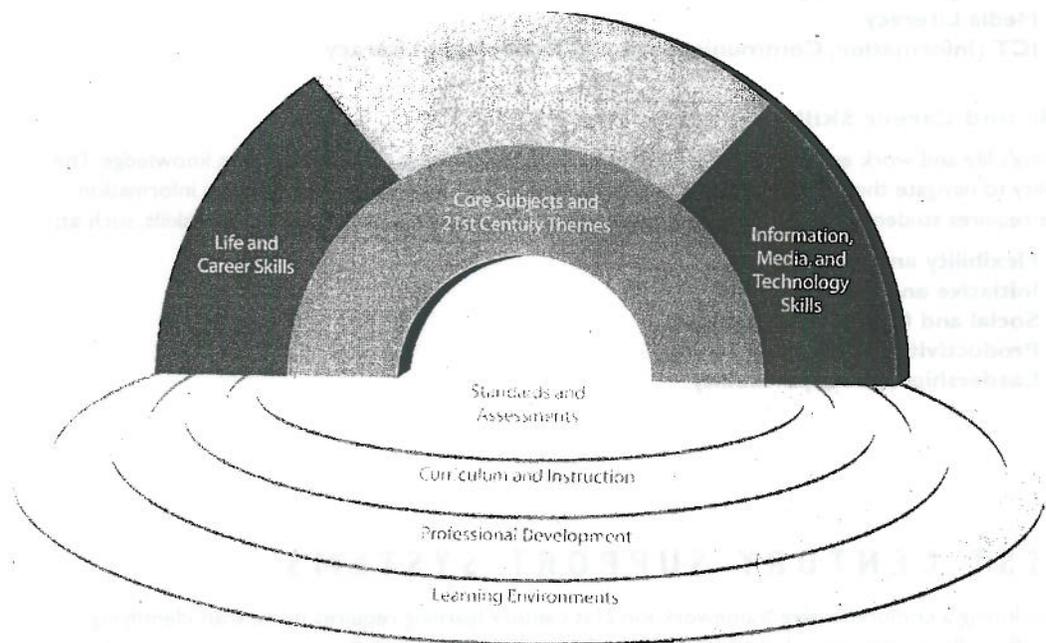
# Framework for 21st Century Learning

## Member Organizations

- Adobe Systems Inc.
- American Association of School Librarians
- Apple
- AT&T
- Blackboard Inc.
- Cable in the Classroom
- Cisco Systems Inc.
- Corporation for Public Broadcasting
- Davis Publications Inc.
- Dell Inc.
- Discovery Education
- EF Education
- Educational Testing Service
- Education Networks of America
- Ford Motor Company Fund
- Intel Foundation
- JA Worldwide
- KnowledgeWorks Foundation
- LeapFrog SchoolHouse
- McGraw-Hill Education
- Microsoft Corporation
- National Education Association
- Oracle Education Foundation
- Pearson Education
- PolyVision
- SAP
- SAS Institute
- Texas Instruments
- THINKronize
- Thomson Gale
- Verizon

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has developed a vision for 21st century student success in the new global economy.

## 21st Century Student Outcomes and Support Systems



## 21ST CENTURY STUDENT OUTCOMES

The elements described in this section as "21st century student outcomes" (represented by the rainbow) are the skills, knowledge and expertise students should master to succeed in work and life in the 21st century.

### Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes

Mastery of **core subjects and 21st century themes** is essential for students in the 21st century. Core subjects include English, reading or language arts, world languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history, government and civics.

We believe schools must move beyond a focus on basic competency in core subjects to promoting understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving **21st century interdisciplinary themes** into core subjects:

- **Global Awareness**
- **Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy**
- **Civic Literacy**
- **Health Literacy**

### **Learning and Innovation Skills**

Learning and innovation skills are what separate students who are prepared for increasingly complex life and work environments in the 21st century and those who are not. They include:

- **Creativity and Innovation**
- **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving**
- **Communication and Collaboration**

### **Information, Media and Technology Skills**

People in the 21st century live in a technology and media-driven environment, marked by access to an abundance of information, rapid changes in technology tools and the ability to collaborate and make individual contributions on an unprecedented scale. To be effective in the 21st century, citizens and workers must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills, such as:

- **Information Literacy**
- **Media Literacy**
- **ICT (Information, Communications and Technology) Literacy**

### **Life and Career Skills**

Today's life and work environments require far more than thinking skills and content knowledge. The ability to navigate the complex life and work environments in the globally competitive information age requires students to pay rigorous attention to developing adequate life and career skills, such as:

- **Flexibility and Adaptability**
- **Initiative and Self-Direction**
- **Social and Cross-Cultural Skills**
- **Productivity and Accountability**
- **Leadership and Responsibility**

## **21ST CENTURY SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

Developing a comprehensive framework for 21st century learning requires more than identifying specific skills, content knowledge, expertise and literacies. An innovative support system must be created to help students master the multi-dimensional abilities required of them in the 21st century. The Partnership has identified five critical support systems that ensure student mastery of 21st century skills:

- **21st Century Standards**
- **Assessment of 21st Century Skills**
- **21st Century Curriculum and Instruction**
- **21st Century Professional Development**
- **21st Century Learning Environments**

For more information, visit the Partnership's website at [www.21stcenturyskills.org](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org).

