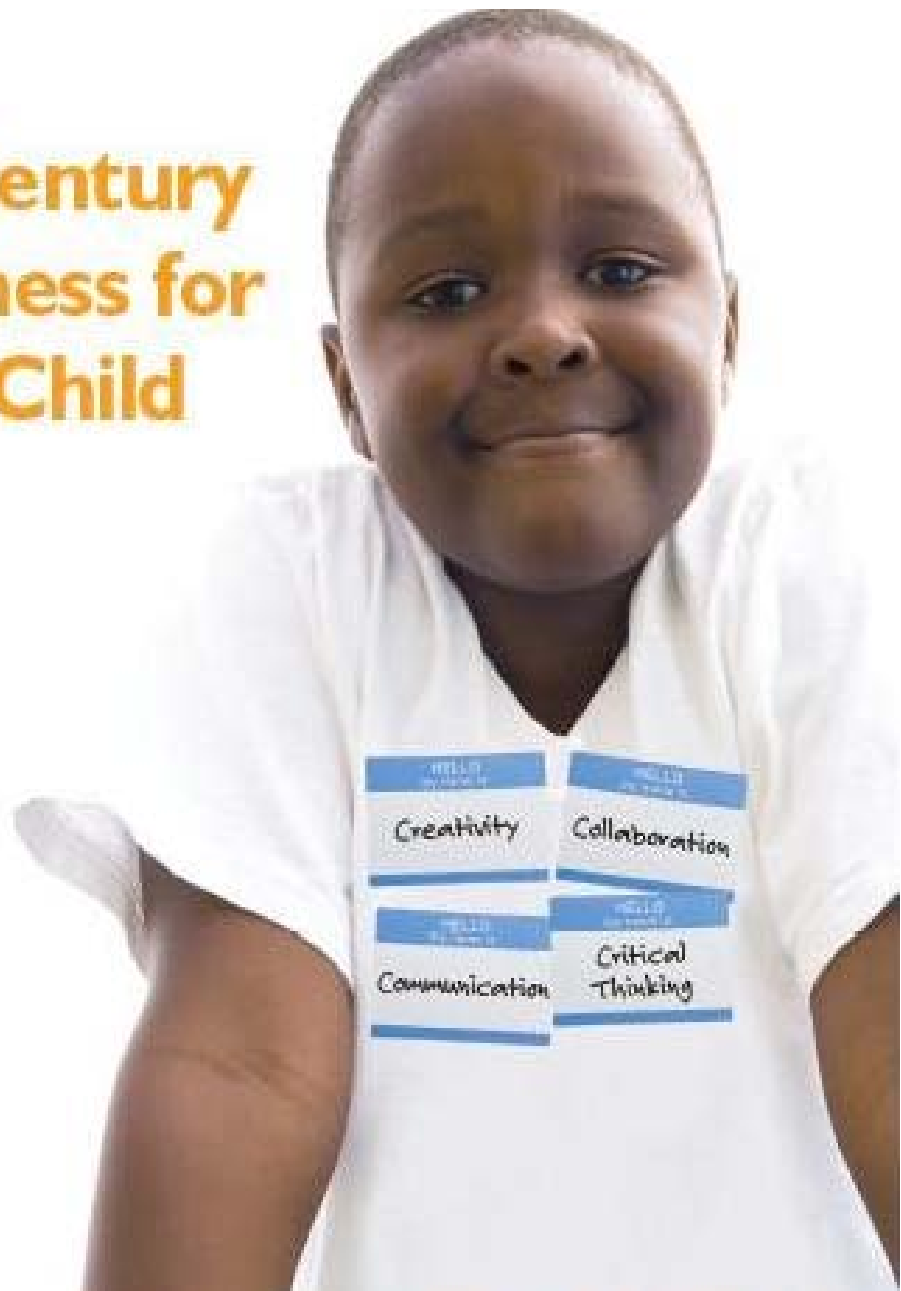

Principles and Recommendations for 21st Century Readiness for Every Child:
A Guide to the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

21st Century Readiness for Every Child



BACKGROUND AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The United States is competing in a global economy that demands innovation from our nation's workforce. Our education policies must help all children keep up with those demands. There is a growing achievement gap between the U.S. and other nations in the interconnected world of the 21st century. America's economic competitiveness suffers when our nation's children lack the knowledge of core subjects AND the critical skills necessary for college and career readiness in the innovation economy of the 21st century.

As Congress considers the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) offers principles and recommendations to provide guidance for strengthening the Act around the means of driving economic development and competitiveness through education, while ensuring equity and accountability.

The Administration's recently released blueprint for reauthorization of ESEA is to be commended for its vision of ensuring every child in America has a world-class education. We support its focus on promoting state-led college and career readiness in standards and assessments, as well as innovative approaches to teaching and learning. We look forward to working with Congress and the Administration throughout the reauthorization process to offer our insight on how best to reach these objectives.

P21 believes in 21st century readiness for every child. To succeed in college and career, students must be able to learn, apply, and adapt in all subjects. We believe this can be accomplished by fusing core content knowledge in the major subjects (the "three Rs") with 21st century skills focused around critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation (the "four Cs"). This concept must become a national imperative and included throughout ESEA. Mastery of the three Rs and the four Cs should be indivisible, measureable, and a basis for student and school accountability. Fusing the three Rs and the four Cs has significant implications for improving teaching and learning and is essential in making learning more rigorous, relevant, and engaging. In reauthorizing ESEA, we believe a focus on content knowledge mastery and 21st century skills will raise the bar on high standards, redefine educational expectations among all students, reframe our means of assessment and accountability around those standards, and give meaningful direction to teacher professional development to meet the demands in teaching a 21st century ready child.

Fourteen states already share this vision for student success through their involvement with P21. These states are leading the way on identifying and delivering the knowledge and skills that students need to be effective 21st century workers and citizens. Continued momentum isn't sustainable without federal policy recognition and support of state innovation.

The following recommendations outline where we believe Congress can best implement the fusing of the three Rs and the four Cs through changes to existing law and/or modifications to the Administration's current blueprint for reform. They focus on three core areas of reform: college and career ready standards, assessment and accountability, and professional development.

COLLEGE AND CAREER READY STANDARDS

The definition of college and career readiness under ESEA must go further than the current proposed goal of eliminating the need for college remedial coursework for high school graduates. Readiness for college and career should indicate that a student is able to apply a range of skill competencies alongside content knowledge mastery, and do so in real world contexts. It is a national imperative that our standards, assessments, and accountability systems and supports be benchmarked against this expanded definition.

Recommendations:

- The Act should define college and career readiness as fusing content knowledge mastery in the three Rs (reading, writing, mathematics, etc.) and four Cs (critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation skills), and that these shall be the principal student outcomes that define success in the 21st century.
- The Act should directly provide for or establish incentives, such as those called for in S. 1029, the 21st Century Incentive Fund Act, to encourage the fusing of the three Rs and four Cs. The Act should allow states to use funds authorized under the Act to support innovative and authentic approaches to incorporate the fusing of the three Rs and the four Cs into their development of internationally benchmarked standards. Accommodations should be created so that developing more challenging standards does not threaten a state's ability to meet accountability criteria.
- Standards should be created as part of a coordinated approach that includes aligned assessments and professional development.

Implementation:

- Codify our recommended definition as part of what a college and career ready student is into Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and allow funds authorized under that section to fuse the three Rs and four Cs.
- Codify eligibility criteria for the incentive based Race to the Top and the Investing in Innovation programs to allow states who seek to fuse the three Rs and four Cs the ability to compete for these funds.
- Codify eligibility criteria for the proposed Effective Teaching and Learning programs in literacy, STEM, and well-rounded education to allow states that seek to fuse the 3Rs with the 4Cs the ability to compete for these funds.
- Codify 21st century readiness into the cross-cutting priorities called for in the Administration's blueprint for reform across all programs.

ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Current required assessments are only testing the basics. They fail to capture the grasp of higher-order skills and do not readily inform classroom instruction. Assessments must measure advanced content and skills in both summative and formative ways. They need to measure college and career readiness standards that fuse the three Rs with the four Cs in order to demonstrate accountability in content mastery with applied skills.

Recommendations:

- The Act should build measurement of the fusing of the three Rs and four Cs into large-scale required summative assessments that are globally benchmarked.
- The Act should build measurement of the fusing of the three Rs and four Cs into formative assessment strategies that assess mastery of these skills in real-time and that impact, inform, and improve instruction.
- Assessments should be created as part of a coordinated approach that includes aligning with standards and professional development.
- The Act should encourage and authorize funds for research and development around assessments that measure the fusing of the three Rs and the four Cs and include in that work the development of an assessment under the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that can compare American students to their international peers in terms of competencies gained through the fusing of the three Rs and the four Cs.

Implementation:

- Codify eligibility criteria and guidelines for assessments created under the proposed Assessing Achievement program that allow for large-scale internationally benchmarked summative and formative assessments that measure the grasp of the three Rs and four Cs so that we can ensure a complete picture of what students need to know and are able to do.
- Codify eligibility criteria for any consortia-based assessment system authorized under the incentive based Race to the Top and the Investing in Innovation programs to allow states that seek to fuse the three Rs with the four Cs to compete for these funds.
- Codify eligibility criteria for programs that support research, evaluation, and statistics under the Institute of Education Sciences to allow for the development of assessments that measure the grasp of the three Rs and the four Cs and authorize the development of an assessment under the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that can compare American students to their international peers in terms of competencies gained through the fusing of the three Rs and the four Cs.
- Codify 21st century readiness into the cross-cutting priorities called for in the Administration's blueprint for reform across all assessment programs.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Students cannot master competencies gained through the fusing of the three Rs and the four Cs unless their teachers, school support personnel and school administrators are well trained and supported in this type of instruction. We must support and train teachers, support personnel, and principals to fuse the three Rs and the four Cs into their classrooms and schools.

Recommendations:

- The Act should support states in their efforts to retool in-service and pre-service teacher professional development to help better prepare educators to deliver instruction that fuses the three Rs and the four Cs.
- The Act should support research and development that identifies best strategies and practices for delivering instruction that fuses the three Rs and the four Cs.
- The Act should support investment in ICT (information communications technologies) excellence to ensure that school personnel can utilize best practices in technology to better deliver instruction.
- The Act should help support the creation, development and sustainability of professional learning communities.

Implementation:

- Codify eligibility criteria and guidelines for professional development programs proposed as part of the Excellent Instructional Teams authority to include those that help educators deliver instruction that fuses the three Rs and the four Cs.
- Codify eligibility criteria for programs that support research, evaluation, and statistics under the Institute of Education Sciences to allow for the development of professional development strategies that help guide instruction that fuse the three Rs and the four Cs.
- Codify 21st century readiness into the cross-cutting priorities called for in the Administration's blueprint for reform across all professional development programs.

ABOUT P21

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is a national organization that advocates for 21st century readiness for every student. As the U.S. continues to compete in a global economy that demands innovation, P21 and its members provide tools and resources to help the U.S. education system fuse the three Rs and the four Cs. P21 advocates for local, state and federal policies that support this approach for states, districts, and schools.

To learn more about 21st century readiness for every student, visit: www.p21.org.