



# Assessment of 21st Century Skills



PARTNERSHIP FOR  
21ST CENTURY SKILLS

## THE CASE FOR 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION:

The success of US education in the 21st century depends upon student acquisition of 21st century skills because:

- 1 Education is changing.** We can no longer claim that the US educational results are unparalleled. Students around the world outperform American students on assessments that measure 21st century skills. Today's teachers need better tools to address this growing problem.
- 2 Competition is changing internationally.** Innovation and creativity no longer set US education apart. Innovators around the world rival Americans in breakthroughs that fuel economic competitiveness.
- 3 The workplace, jobs and skill demands are changing.** Today every student, whether he/she plans to go on to a 4-year college, trade school or entry-level job, requires 21st century skills to succeed. We need to ensure that all students are qualified to succeed in work and life in this new global economy.

21st century skills are the skills students need to succeed in work, school and life. They include:

- Core subjects (as defined by NCLB)
- 21st century content: global awareness, financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy, civic literacy and health and wellness awareness
- Learning and thinking skills: critical thinking and problem solving skills, communications skills, creativity and innovation skills, collaboration skills, contextual learning skills and information and media literacy skills
- Information and communications technology literacy
- Life skills: leadership, ethics, accountability, adaptability, personal productivity, personal responsibility, people skills, self-direction and social responsibility

## WHY DO WE NEED ASSESSMENTS OF 21ST CENTURY SKILLS?

Most K-12 assessments in widespread use today—whether they be of 21st century skills and content or of traditional core subject areas—measure a student's knowledge of discrete facts, not a student's ability to apply knowledge in complex situations. High stakes assessments alone do not generate evidence of the skill sets that the business and education communities believe will ensure success in the 21st century.

## WHAT IS ASSESSMENT OF 21ST CENTURY SKILLS?

This new model of assessment must:

- Measure student mastery of 21st century skills.
- Diagnose where students require intervention in terms of 21st century skills.
- Measure the educational system's effectiveness in teaching 21st century skills.
- Permit students to demonstrate their proficiency in 21st century skills to educational institutions and prospective employers.

## WHAT DOES ASSESSMENT OF 21ST CENTURY SKILLS LOOK LIKE?

As a nation, we must measure what we value. Yet there are no assessments of 21st century skills in widespread use today. Progress is emerging, however, in the following examples, which model how assessment of 21st century skills can be undertaken successfully:

- **The ETS Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) Literacy Assessment is a 75-minute scenario-based test that is designed to measure students' ability to use digital technology, communication tools and networks to solve information problems.** The test measures the ability to use critical thinking skills to define, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create and communicate information in a technological environment. The Core Level assessment is designed for students transitioning from high school to college, and for first- and second-year students at higher education institutions. The Advanced Level is for rising college juniors and for students transitioning from two-year to four-year institutions.
- **At Coventry High school in Rhode Island, students post online portfolios demonstrating not only their mastery of a content area, but how they mastered it.** Students post their work using both text and multimedia presentations. They also include reflective comments about the process of learning, noting, for example, when collaborative exercises worked well and what information was gained as a result. Teachers gain a more thorough and nuanced view of a student's progress through this type of classroom-based assessment tool.
- **The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), developed by the Council for Aid to Education, is a national effort that provides colleges and universities with information about how well their students are doing with respect to critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and written communication.** Each CLA performance task requires students to use different sets of critical-thinking, analytic-reasoning, problem-solving, and written-communication skills to answer several open-ended questions involving a hypothetical, but realistic, situation. A high-school version has been developed and is currently being piloted.
- **Britain's new Key Stage 3 (for ages 12–13) ICT Onscreen ICT Test assesses both content-area and thinking skills online.** It requires students to use their ICT skills to solve a set of complex problems involving research, communication, information management, and presentation. Test activities take place within a "virtual town," with its visual and informational assets (text, pictures, data, and offline articles, maps, photographs, diagrams, tables, charts, and interview notes or transcripts). Students use these documents to draft their answers to the task's questions within the 90-minute test period.

### Questions you can consider about 21st century skills and assessment:

- 1 Is my district considering developing or adopting general achievement tests that include 21st century skills?
- 2 Are teachers in my district using classroom-based assessments that measure 21st century skills?

## WHAT IS THE PARTNERSHIP FOR 21ST CENTURY SKILLS?

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is a coalition of corporations and organizations that serves as a catalyst to position 21st century skills at the center of US K-12 education by building collaborative partnerships among education, business, communities and government.