Best Practices in Soft Skills Assessment

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In the following report, Hanover Research examines best practices in measuring soft skills, such as teamwork, creativity, and character, with a focus on soft skill assessments embedded into the core academic curriculum.

HANOVER RESEARCH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Nationwide, educators have grown increasingly aware of the important role that soft skills play in ensuring students are adequately prepared to enter college and the workforce. Unfortunately, however, traditional instruction and assessment do not always provide the appropriate tools for developing and measuring student success outside of traditional academic subject areas. This report examines these issues in soft skills assessment with a focus on assessment strategies that may be successfully embedded within the core academic curriculum.

- **Section I: Best Practices in Soft Skills Assessment** briefly describes the impact of soft skills instruction and assessment, discusses the relationship between soft skills assessment and the core academic curriculum, examines common challenges to assessing soft skills, and describes three alternative reporting schemes for tracking student progress in the development of soft skills.
- **Section II: Profiles** describes assessment practices implemented by three exemplars in soft skills instruction and assessment: Catalina Foothills School District in Tucson, Arizona, Plymouth High School in Plymouth, Wisconsin, and New Technology High School in Napa Valley, California.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Soft skills assessment is highly dependent upon the core academic curriculum.** Researchers and educators agree that soft skills instruction should be embedded in the core curriculum, and, as a result, assessment practices must also align with those of the academic curriculum. Districts and schools with a focus on soft skills may assess specific soft skills as they apply to individual subject areas or assess a set of common soft skills that apply across all subject areas. A project-based curriculum permits simultaneous instruction and assessment in both the core academic curriculum and in a range of soft skills.
- **Educators face unique challenges in assessing soft skills.** Some educators have expressed concern that quantifying student achievement in certain areas, such as collaboration, creativity, and character, may actually discourage the development of these skills. Educators have attempted to overcome these concerns by ensuring that students, teachers, and parents approach these assessments with the proper context and understand how to use these assessments as instructional tools.
- **Educators may need to adopt non-traditional methods of reporting student progress to adequately capture growth in soft skill development.** Standards-based report cards provide details of student progress in specific dimensions, which can improve the use of report cards in improving specific student outcomes. Portfolio grading can provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate soft skills across

multiple core academic subject areas. Further, digital badges have recently emerged as an engaging technique for tracking and recognizing student progress in the development of specific non-academic skills.

- **Districts and schools recognized for their success in developing student soft skills embed soft skills instruction and assessment across the curriculum.** The Catalina Foothills School District uses standards-based report cards to track student progress in specific soft skill dimensions essential to each academic subject. Plymouth High School teachers all assess student progress in the four soft skills emphasized across the curriculum, and New Technology High School provides students with many opportunities to demonstrate soft skill development both inside and outside of the classroom.

SECTION I: BEST PRACTICES IN SOFT SKILLS ASSESSMENT

This section briefly describes the impact of soft skills instruction and assessment, discusses the relationship between soft skills assessment and the core academic curriculum, examines common challenges to assessing soft skills, and describes three alternative reporting schemes for tracking student progress in the development of soft skills.

IMPACT

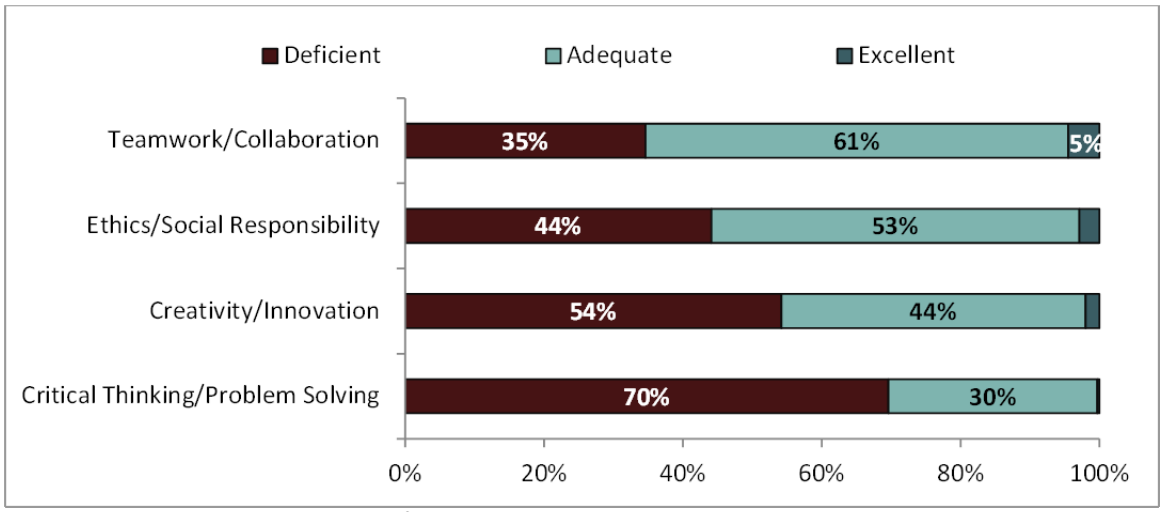
In recent years, a large body of research has established the importance of soft skills in fostering student academic achievement and long-term success. Some educators consider soft skills essential for the application of lessons learned in core academic subjects. These educators frequently frame soft skill development as complementary to instruction in core academic areas and commend schools with a "balanced approach" for producing graduates with "both rigorous content knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge successfully."[1] Other researchers and educators highlight the direct impact of soft skill development on achievement in core academic subjects. Students who participate in cooperative learning, for example, not only improve teamwork skills but also learn faster and more efficiently, are more likely to persist in their education, and feel more positive about learning than students taught in traditional classroom settings.[2]

Leaders in education and industry also consider soft skill development essential for career preparation. A 2006 study conducted by the Conference Board in collaboration with the Partnership for 21st Century Schools (P21) found that a substantial proportion of employers consider recent high school graduates deficient in a number of applied skills such as collaboration and creativity. Figure 1.1 on the following page describes employer ratings of the preparedness of recent high school graduates four key college and career readiness skills. As educators recognize the growing importance of soft skill development in student outcomes, effective assessment becomes increasingly critical to school improvement efforts.

[1] Gaines, R., Mohammed, M. "Soft Skills Development in K-12 Education: Research Brief." Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, 2013, p 1. http://www.glisi.org/sites/default/files/GLISI_SSResearchBrief_E1.pdf

[2] "Cooperative Learning." Johns Hopkins University, 2012. http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/strategies/topics/Cooperative%20Learning/

Figure 1.1: Employer Ratings of Recent High School Graduates



Source: Partnership for 21st Century Skills[3]

ASSESSMENT AND CURRICULUM

Leaders in college and career readiness recommend that academic instruction and soft skill development occur simultaneously to meet student needs and curricular objectives.[4] Researchers emphasize that not only are soft skills "best taught within traditional disciplines," but also that programs designed to teach soft skills without a broader context have shown limited evidence of success.[5] Thus, how a school or district chooses to assess soft skills is highly dependent upon the school curriculum.

Districts and schools have adopted many approaches to incorporating soft skills into the academic curriculum. Often, schools select specific soft skills to emphasize across all subjects and grade levels. For example, Metro Schools of Design in Corpus Christi, Texas requires all teachers to assess students in their academic content areas and in five "core 21st century skills," including collaboration, creativity, communication, professional ethics, and critical thinking. All teachers within the schools use common, multi-dimensional rubrics to grade students in each of these areas.[6] Similar soft skills curriculum and assessment schemes are employed by the Catalina Foothills School District in Arizona and Plymouth High School in Wisconsin, each identified as exemplars in soft skill instruction and profiled in Section II of this report.

[3] "Are They Really Ready to Work?" P21, 2006, p. 32. http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/FINAL_REPORT_PDF09-29-06.pdf
[4] "College and Career Readiness: What Do We Mean?" ConnectEd: California Center for College and Career. January, 2012, p. 17. http://www.ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/CACRFramework_V1-1_2012_0126.pdf
[5] Jerald, C. "Defining a 21st Century Education." The Center for Public Education, 2009, p. 59. http://www.cfsd16.org/public/_century/pdf/Defininga21stCenturyEducation_Jerald_2009.pdf
[6] "21st Century Learning Integrates Knowledge and Applied-Knowledge Skills." Metro Schools of Design. http://metroschools.net/softskills.html#blank

In some cases, soft skill assessment varies from subject to subject. For example, New York City Public Schools has published "priority benchmark skills" and accompanying assessments in information fluency that link the skills required for library research with specific soft skills, including the pursuit of personal and aesthetic growth and the demonstration of social responsibility. Language arts teachers and librarians may use the benchmarks and accompanying assessments in daily instruction of academic skills as well as personal development.[7] This model differs from that employed by the Metro Schools of Design and other exemplar districts in that the rubrics used to assess student progress are subject-specific and do not necessarily apply across the curriculum.

While educators employ many strategies to integrate soft skills within the curriculum, **project-based learning is widely considered one of the most effective instructional techniques for teaching and assessing 21st century skills**. Through project-based learning, students engage in meaningful, long-term projects to develop and demonstrate essential skills. Not only does project-based learning require students to apply soft skills, but it also provides teachers with opportunities to directly assess student progress in established standards related to soft skill development. A successful project-based assessment framework, however, requires the adoption of a project-based curriculum.[8]

In most cases, the adoption of a new soft skills assessment scheme will necessitate changes in the curriculum. Proponents of project-based learning contend that 21st century skills "are not measureable through standardized tests" and that effective teaching of these skills will necessitate a shift toward more "authentic" assessment.[9] P21, which also endorses project-based learning, recommends against using traditional testing models to measure student progress on the grounds that that these models fail to adequately measure essential student skills and effectively inform instruction.[10]

While instruction in soft skills must be integrated within the academic curriculum for effective assessment, educators also note the value of promoting soft skills outside of the classroom setting. **Extra-curricular settings, such as afterschool programs, athletics, and clubs, can be natural environments for soft skill development**.[11] The end of this section discusses the use of digital badges to track student progress in soft skill development, which could provide educators with the opportunity to assess soft skills in multiple settings.

[7] "Information Fluency Continuum: K-12 Priority Benchmark Skills and Assessments." New York City Public Schools. http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/2BD1C6F6-E583-41E8-9D8A-8578447FBF9A/0/IFCK12PriorityBenhmarkSkillsandAssessments.pdf

[8] Larmer, J., Mergendoller, J., "The Main Course, Not Dessert." Buck Institute for Education, 2010, pp. 1-4. http://images.bie.org/uploads/useful_stuff/Main_Course.pdf

[9] Bell, S. "Project-Based Learning for the 21st Century: Skills for the Future." *The Clearing House*, 83(2), 2010, p. 43. http://images.bie.org/uploads/useful_stuff/PBL_Skills_for_the_Future.pdf

[10] "21st Century Skills Assessment." The Partnership For 21st Century Skills. October 2007, p. 1. http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/21st_Century_Skills_Assessment_e-paper.pdf

[11] "College and Career Readiness." Op. cit., p. 17.

ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES

Soft skills instruction and assessment is fundamentally different from traditional instruction in core academic subjects, and, as a result, educators may face certain obstacles in assessment that are unique to specific soft skills. For example, Grant Wiggins, president of Authentic Education, a professional development service provider for K-12 schools, has observed concern among educators that assessments that measure creativity may actually inhibit development of this skill.[12] Wiggins describes an experience using rubrics to assess student story writing with a group of language arts teachers. Although teachers easily recognized that some student stories were simply dull and that these stories were in some fundamental way deficient, they were reluctant to label student work as "engaging" or "not engaging" as defined in the assessment rubric. Wiggins writes:

> [Eventually,] they reluctantly agreed – and found that their students easily understood the difference between "engaging" and "not engaging" and accepted the assessment criterion as common sense. Oh, you mean you don't want it to be dull and boring, [asked] one kid.... Oh, we didn't think that mattered in school writing, said a girl.[13]

Wiggins' experience illustrates the importance of setting clear expectations for student work. For educators to foster creativity, they must first communicate to students that skill is valued. The Center for Real-World Learning has similarly encouraged educators to directly communicate expectations in the realm of creativity, but also cautions that assessments of student creativity may be difficult for students to interpret. Figure 1.2 describes several advantages and disadvantages of assessing student creativity that educators must consider.

Figure 1.2: Advantages and Disadvantages of Creativity Assessments

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
▪ Indicates that creativity is seen as an important aspect of the formal curriculum in schools ▪ Inspires the development of curricula and teaching activities that foster creativity ▪ Provides a way of articulating and evidencing the value of creativity ▪ Bringing schools into line with workplaces where assessment of creativity is practiced ▪ Helps teachers to be more precise in their understanding of creativity ▪ Provides formative feedback to students to enable them to developing their creativity more effectively	▪ May encourage overly simplistic interpretations of what creativity is ▪ May be confused with a comment about a student's character, for instance, being unimaginative ▪ Assessment "scores" may be used inappropriately for summative evaluations of student performance ▪ Concerns that assessments may be made without regard to context ▪ Practical difficulties of measuring something that manifests itself in a range of school subjects

Source: Center for Real-World Learning[14]

[12] Wiggins, G. "On assessing for creativity." Granted, and…. (Blog), Feb. 3, 2012. http://grantwiggins.wordpress.com/2012/02/03/on-assessing-for-creativity-yes-you-can-and-yes-you-should/
[13] Ibid.
[14] Lucas, B., Claxton, G., and Spencer, E. "Progression in Creativity." Center for Real-World Learning, 2012, p. 3. http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/50153675.pdf

Evaluation of collaborative work also presents unique challenges. Typically, teachers evaluate collaborative work by assessing both the work of individual students and the performance of the group as a whole. In 2010, Educause Learning Initiative published a series of recommendations for the evaluation of both individual and collective outcomes of collaborative learning projects:

- Evaluations of collaborative work must be timely, transparent, and systematic to avoid stress and resentment among students.[15]
- A contract that outlines the roles, communication protocols, timelines, and quality standards, of both students and teachers provides structure. Instructors must model accountability throughout collaborative projects in order to demonstrate that "free-loading" is unacceptable.[16]
- Evaluations may be made from the perspective of the team, the instructor, or an external observer.[17]

Similar to assessments of teamwork and creativity, character assessments are also susceptible to unintended negative effects. In recent years, the KIPP charter school network has been the subject of some criticism over the use of character report cards. Critics contend that character education should focus upon "encouragement and self-reflection," and have expressed concern that grading character shifts the focus away from true character development.[18] In its current form, the KIPP character report cards measure student growth in seven "'highly predictive' character strengths" that researchers have seen correlated with student outcomes, including "**zest, grit, self-control, hope/optimism, curiosity, gratitude, and social intelligence**."[19] Students receive ratings for each character strength on a scale from 1-5 by each teacher each quarter. [20] While the character report card does offer numerical scores of student progress, KIPP leaders are careful to note that the purpose of the character card is not to quantify student character, but rather to serve as a meaningful talking point for teachers, parents, and students:

> The KIPP character growth card provides an opportunity for teachers, parents, and students to have meaningful conversations around the development of character. Its purpose is less to quantify what "character" means and more to provide a vehicle for people to talk about character in a rigorous and nuanced manner. [21]

[15] Diaz, Veronica et al. "Unit 4: Assessment of Collaborative Learning Project Outcomes." Educause Learning Initiative. 2010, p. 1. https://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI80084.pdf
[16] Ibid., p. 3-4.
[17] Ibid., p. 4-5.
[18] Ferlazzo, L. "Why Schools Should Not Grade Character Traits." *The Washington Post*, 20 October 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/why-schools-should-not-grade-character-traits/2011/10/20/gIQAJuoU0L_blog.html
[19] "Questions & Answers: KIPP NYC's Approach to Character/Character Growth Card." KIPP. http://www.kipp.org/files/dmfile/CharacterQA.pdf
[20] "KIPP Character Growth Card." KIPP. http://www.kipp.org/files/dmfile/KIPPNYCCharacterGrowthCardSAMPLE2.pdf
[21] "Questions & Answers: KIPP NYC's Approach to Character/Character Growth Card," Op. cit.

ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING SCHEMES

While it is quite common for teachers to incorporate soft skills instruction and assessment into day-to-day practices, reporting student progress in soft skill development on report cards is somewhat less common. This subsection describes three techniques for reporting measures of soft skill development over the course of a grading period or the academic year.

STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARDS

Traditional report cards award holistic grades in individual subjects but fail to describe the specific areas in which a student excels or struggles. Letter grades on traditional report cards typically combine student achievement across three broad categories:

- **Product** relates to students' specific achievements or level of performance based on examinations, final reports, projects, or portfolios, and overall assessments of performance.
- **Process** relates to students' effort, class behavior, or work habits. It also might include evidence from daily work, regular classroom quizzes, homework, class participation, or punctuality of assignments in determining students' grades.
- **Progress** relates to how much students actually gain from their learning experiences. Teachers who use progress criteria typically look at how far students have come rather than where students are.[22]

Rather than masking these components of student achievement, standards-based grading can provide teachers with the opportunity to describe student progress in each of these categories separately. For example, teachers may ascribe scores for a project as well as scores for a student's teamwork on said project.

The philosophy of mastery- or standards-based reporting enables students, parents, and teachers to see where specific strengths and deficits lie at each evaluation point, providing more nuanced information than a simple letter grade provides. Standards-based report cards are not, however, merely a mechanism for evaluating students and checking up on their progress, however; mastery reporting also ensures that districts develop clear expectations for students from the outset, which prepares students for success during the year as they know what they need to achieve to reach a mastery level of knowledge.[23]

Section II presents a sample standards-based report card published by the Catalina Foothills School District that describes student progress in meeting academic standards and developing relevant soft skills.

[22] Taken verbatim from: Guskey, T., Jung, L. "The Challenges of Standards-Based Grading." *Leadership Compass*, 4(2), 2006, p. 1. http://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Leadership_Compass/2006/LC2006v4n2a3.pdf

[23] Hu, W. "Report Cards Give Up A's and B's for 4s and 3s." New York Times. 25 March 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/25/education/25cards.html?pagewanted=all

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

Student portfolios refer to "a collection of work that a learner has collected, selected, organized, reflected upon, and presented to show understanding and growth over time."[24] Proponents argue that portfolio assessments encourage students to take pride in their work and provide meaningful conversation tools for students, teachers, and parents.[25] While some educators have noted that portfolio work can be difficult to quantify, researchers and educators have identified several strategies for effective use of portfolios in instruction and assessment.[26]

A study conducted in Pittsburgh public schools examined two key criticisms of portfolio assessment systems: variability in the judgments of raters and variability in the collection of student work. The techniques used in their study led to significantly higher reliability of portfolio assessments. For effective use of portfolio assessment, researchers concluded:

- The purposes of the assessment must be clear, and the practices must be consistent with that goal.
- There must be a shared interpretive framework within the community conducting and using the assessment.
- There must be coherence in the system, so that accountability goals are consistent with classroom goals.[27]

The study also engaged teachers responsible for rating portfolios in training and calibration workshops to improve consistency among raters.[28]

A U.S. Department of Education (DOE) Consumer Guide also notes issues of variability, both in terms of the types of work placed into a student's portfolio and the criteria used by teachers to judge the work's quality, and echoes the recommendations from the Pittsburgh public schools study. Specifically, the U.S. DOE recommends that **schools employing portfolio assessment establish clear rubrics for measuring student progress, have more than one evaluator assess each portfolio, and provide training to all evaluators**.[29]

New Technology High School, profiled in Section II, relies upon portfolios for assessing student progress across the curriculum.

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[24] Barrett, H. "Using Electronic Portfolios for Formative/Classroom-based Assessment." The REFLECT Initiative, June 2006, p. 1. http://electronicportfolios.org/portfolios/ConnectedNewsletter.pdf

[25] Ash, K. "E-Portfolios Evolve Thanks to Web 2.0 Tools." Education Week, June 15, 2011. http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2011/06/15/03e-portfolio.h04.html

[26] Neiman, L., "Linking Theory and Practice in Portfolio Assessment." RealClassroomIdeas.com, October 26, 1999, p. 5. http://realclassroomideas.com/resources/Portfolios-Linking+Theory+and+Practice+in+Portfolio+Assessment.doc

[27] LeMahieu, P. G., Gitomer, D. H., and Eresh, J. T. "Portfolios in Large-scale Assessment Difficult But Not Impossible." Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 14:3, September 1995, p. 28. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1745-3992.1995.tb00863.x/abstract

[28] Ibid., p. 12.

[29] "Student Portfolios: Administrative Uses." U.S. Department of Education, December 1993. http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/OR/ConsumerGuides/admuses.html

BADGES

Digital badges are an emerging tool educators have adopted to recognize students in the development of skills that may not be adequately presented on a traditional report card. Educators have described badges as tools for measuring and recognizing "competencies, skills, training, collaborative abilities, character, personal contribution, participatory energy, leadership and motivational skills, and other so-called 'hard' and 'soft' individual and cooperative talents."[30]

Multiple organizations support school districts in the development of badge systems for monitoring and rewarding student progress.[31]How educators use badge systems may vary according to the needs of the district, school, or classroom. For example, through use of classroom technology, some teachers award students badges as they demonstrate specific competencies in the classroom. Alternatively, educators in the Alberta Educational System have considered badges as opportunities for students to pursue long-term goals as they complete requisite tasks.[32]

Educators have embraced badges for many reasons. Badges not only bring some excitement to the assessment process, some educators argue, but also encourage students by focusing on positive achievements, rather than the reductive identification of strengths and weaknesses. The nature of the badge system also permits teachers to measure progress in specific dimensions, rather than broadly defined ones.[33]

Advocates for badges as a tool for measuring student skills also highlight the opportunity for badges to effectively measure student progress in specific areas across academic disciplines as well as in extracurricular activities. For example, if opportunities exist to earn badges by demonstrating soft skills in different classes as well as in afterschool programs, then measures of student skill acquisition would not necessarily need to be linked to performance of each skill in specific classroom settings.[34]

Although growth in tools to help K-12 educators use badges to assess student progress has been rapid, the use in K-12 classrooms is still new and no rigorous studies or consensus

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[30] Farber, M. "Badges and the Common Core." Edutopia, 11 September 2013. http://www.edutopia.org/blog/badges-and-the-common-core-matthew-farber

[31] [1] "Youtopia makes it easy to manage and motivate your crowd." Youtopia. http://home.youtopia.com/
[2] "Digital Badges for Education!" For All Badges. http://www.forallbadges.com/
[3] "The free and easy way to award badges to students for all learning experiences." ClassBadges. http://classbadges.com/
[4] "Blackboard Partners with Mozilla to support Use of Digital Badges." Blackboard. http://www.blackboard.com/About-Bb/News-Center/Press-Releases.aspx?releaseid=122697

[32] "Learner Competencies and Badges in the K-12 Alberta Educational System." Alberta Educational System. http://www.slideshare.net/missrithenay/badges-assignment-two

[33] Anderson, A. "Teacher's Voice: Why Educational Badges Trump Letter Grades as Motivators." Wired Academic, 13 November 2012. http://www.wiredacademic.com/2012/11/k12-teachers-voice-why-educational-bades-trump-letter-grades-as-motivator/

[34] Ash, K. "'Digital Badges' Would Represent Students' Skill Acquisition." *Education Week*, 13 June 2012. http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2012/06/13/03badges.h05.html

exists to suggest the overall value of this system. Some external programs have, however, reported some success using the tools to help instructors and counselors identify student skills and interests. For example, the Providence After School Alliance uses badges not only to track student progress, but also to connect students with opportunities that align with their interests and strengths.[35]

[35] "Tracking Middle School Passions Through High School." Providence After School Alliance. http://www.mypasa.org/hub-high-school/skill-recognition

SECTION II: PROFILES

This section profiles three exemplars in soft skills instruction and assessment: Catalina Foothills School District in Tucson, Arizona, Plymouth High School in Plymouth, Wisconsin, and New Technology High School in Napa Valley, California.

CATALINA FOOTHILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Catalina Foothills School District (CFSD) in Tucson, Arizona operates eight schools and has a total enrollment of approximately 5,100 students.[36] Recently, P21 recognized CFSD for "promising" practices in the use of rubrics for soft skill assessment.[37] In 2012, the Arizona Department of Education identified CFSD as an exemplary district in part for the district's focus on 21st century skills.[38]

Beginning in 2005 with the adoption of the 21st Century Learning Plan, CFSD successfully incorporated 21st century skills across the curriculum.[39] CFSD made communication and transparency the two main priorities of their reform process and included teachers, principals, parents, and the community in the transition to the new curriculum.[40]

Between 2005 and 2007, teachers and principals worked collaboratively to pinpoint districtwide learning outcomes, design appropriate curriculum, and develop and implement rubrics in each skill area.[41] These evaluation rubrics assess student skills in seven areas, including **critical and creative thinking, self-direction, communication, systems thinking, cultural competence, teamwork, and leadership**. District educators also developed similar rubrics to assess skill development in academic subjects with greater nuance.[42] CFSD has recognized the value of these standards-based report cards as a tool that "separately assesses the influence of positive and consistent work habits, effort, and participation."[43]

Students in grades K-8 are scored on a scale from 1-4 on each grade-level standard, as displayed in Figure 2.1 on the following page.

[36] "Progress Report." Arizona Department of Education. November 2012, p. 6. http://www.cfsd16.org/public/_century/pdf/ADE_November-2012-progressreport.pdf
[37] "Assessment: A 21st Century Skills Implementation Guide." Partnership for 21st Century Skills, p. 5. http://tla.or.th/document/2556/p21-stateimp_assessment.pdf
[38] "Progress Report," Op. cit., p. 6.
[39] Ibid.
[40] "What's Working? Lessons from pioneer 21st century school districts - Part 1." P21 Blog. 2010. http://www.p21.org/news-events/p21blog/1087-bob-pearlman-whats-working
[41] Ibid.
[42] "Resources." Catalina Foothills School District. http://www.cfsd16.org/public/_century/centMain.aspx
[43] "K-8 Standards-Based Report Card." Catalina Foothills School District. http://www.cfsd16.org/public/_distInfo/K-8%20Report%20Card_Info.pdf

Figure 2.1: Rubric Scores for CFSD Standards-Based Report Cards

Rubric Score	Descriptor	Definition
4.0	Advanced	Exceeds the Standard
3.0	Proficient	Meets the Standard
2.0	Basic	Approaching the Standard
1.0	Below Basic	Does Not Meet the Standard

Source: CFSD[44]

Figure 2.2 depicts a sample grade 3 report card that CFSD parents may access electronically. As shown in the image below, the report card includes a space for traditional grades in individual subjects as well as a space for teachers to evaluate student progress toward meeting specific standards. The set of standards associated with each subject include both academic skills and soft skills. For example, the language arts standards include reading fluency and vocabulary, as well as self-direction and effort.[45]

Figure 2.2: Sample Report Card

ELEMENTARY REPORT CARD

Student: Johnny Smith **School Year: 2009-10** **Grade: 3**

Class/Subject	Teacher	T1	P&SR	T2	P&SR	T3	P&SR	Comment
Language Arts								(These are the optional pre-fab comments)
Science								
Math								Ex: Indicate modified instruction/curriculum
Social Studies								
Spanish								
Art								Ex: Indicate not taught this marking period
Music								
P.E.								
Health								

Language Arts	T1	T2	T3
Concepts About Print			
Phonemic Awareness			
Reading Fluency			
Word Analysis and Vocabulary			
Strategies to Guide and Monitor Comprehension			
Main Idea and Supporting Details			
Textual Relationships			
Text Structures, Elements, and Techniques			
Research			
Writing Process			
Writing Style			
Writing Applications and Formats			
Language Conventions			
Interactive Communication: Visual and Writing Applications			
Interactive Communication: Speaking and Listening Applications			
P&SR: Self-Direction			
P&SR: Work Completion/Effort			

Teacher Comment: (This is an optional freeform comment)

Source: CFSD

[44] Ibid.
[45] "Elementary Report Card." Catalina Foothills School District. http://www.bobpearlman.org/Learning21/images/CFSD_Elementary_%20Report_Card.jpg

CFSD promotes reliability in soft skills assessment through the use of professional learning communities. CFSD teachers meet regularly to analyze student achievement data, compare observations about students, and collectively formulate future steps.[46]

PLYMOUTH HIGH SCHOOL

Plymouth High School in Plymouth, Wisconsin enrolled 817 students in the 2010-2011 school year. [47] In 2013, the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement recognized Plymouth High School for launching a successful soft skills instructional program "to enhance its academic instruction and the integrity of its grading practices."[48] At Plymouth High School, **teachers in each subject use a four-point rubric to assess students in collaboration, respect, initiative, and work habits**.[49]

Plymouth High School embeds soft skills assessment into day-to-day activities in academic courses.[50] Teachers of all academic subjects evaluate individual students in each class on each of the four soft skills emphasized in the curriculum using a common rubric. Report cards include soft skill scores for each class.[51] Although scores in soft sills do not appear on official transcripts, many partner businesses in the region require students' soft skills report card as part of the hiring review process.[52]

Figure 2.3 presents the Plymouth High School grading rubric for soft skills. As demonstrated, **the criteria for assessing each skill includes concrete measures of student behavior, such as completing work on time and participating in activities, as well as more qualitative measures of the student's attitude** .

[46] "Progress Report," Op. cit., p.7.
[47] Elementary/Secondary Information System. National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/
[48] Gaines, Op. cit., p. 3.
[49] "Soft Skills." Plymouth School District. http://www.plymouth.k12.wi.us/Schools/WHY/softskills.html
[50] Gaines, Op. cit., p. 3.
[51] "Soft Skills." Op. cit.
[52] Ibid.

Figure 2.3: Grading Rubric – Soft Skills

	Below Expectations	Emerging Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Collaboration	▪ Rarely participates in team activities ▪ Rarely provides thoughtful ideas in teams ▪ Rarely values and encourages team members	▪ Participates minimally and requires some prompting as a team member ▪ Sometimes provides thoughtful ideas in teams ▪ Sometimes values and encourages all team members	▪ A strong team member ▪ Provides thoughtful ideas in teams ▪ Values and encourages all team members	▪ Acts as a leader or exemplary team ▪ Consistently provides thoughtful ideas in teams ▪ Consistently values and encourages all members of teams
Respect	▪ Usually ignores the opinions and input of others ▪ Needs improvement in demonstrating respectful and helpful behavior	▪ Shows growth in accepting others ▪ Improvement noticed in demonstrating respectful and helpful behaviors	▪ Listens and accepts the opinions of others ▪ Demonstrates both respectful and helpful behavior	▪ Seeks and accepts the opinions and input of others ▪ Consistently demonstrates both respectful and helpful behavior
Initiative	▪ Seldom demonstrates curiosity in learning activities ▪ Rarely engages in learning activities ▪ Lacks perseverance ▪ Rarely uses alternate resources to assist with learning	▪ Occasionally demonstrates curiosity and interest in learning ▪ Sometimes engages in learning activities ▪ Occasionally perseveres ▪ Shows growth in resourcefulness and sometimes seeks assistance	▪ Demonstrates curiosity and interest in learning ▪ Engages in learning activities ▪ Demonstrates perseverance ▪ Demonstrates resourcefulness and seeks assistance as necessary	▪ Initiates curiosity and interest in learning ▪ Independently engages in learning activities ▪ Consistently perseveres and problem solves ▪ Demonstrates resourcefulness and seeks assistance as necessary
Work Habits	▪ Seldom punctual and prepared ▪ Rarely displays a positive attitude ▪ Needs to remain focused on task ▪ Does not strive to meet potential ▪ Needs to complete tasks and meet deadlines	▪ Occasionally punctual and prepared ▪ Shows improvement in displaying a positive attitude ▪ Sometimes stays on task ▪ Beginning to strive to meet potential ▪ Inconsistent with task completion	▪ Punctual and prepared for class ▪ Displays a positive attitude ▪ Stays on task ▪ Strives to meet potential ▪ Completes tasks and meets deadlines	▪ Always punctual and prepared ▪ Consistently displays a positive attitude ▪ Always on task ▪ Always strives to reach full potential ▪ Spends extra time to ensure tasks are well done

Source: Plymouth School District[53]

[53] "Soft Skills," Op. cit.

NEW TECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL

In the 2010-2011 school year, New Technology High School in Napa Valley, California enrolled 380 students. The school was established to teach students who are prepared "to excel in an information-based, technologically advanced society."[54] Despite the school's name, the curriculum is less focused on technology than on eight key competencies:

- Content standards
- Collaboration
- Critical thinking
- Oral communication
- Written communication
- Career preparation
- Citizenship and ethics
- Technology literacy[55]

According to a school administrator, **the curriculum was developed so that critical thinking, collaboration, and communication were not taught separately in electives, but rather are "embed[ded] into every single class."**[56] As such, all courses are structured on project-based learning, with students working in groups on in-depth projects over three to eight weeks. Teachers assign projects by presenting a complex initial inquiry, which is then pursued by the teams of three or more students. Instruction related to the final project consists of activities or lectures delivering information. **The students are assessed on their demonstration of each of the eight competencies as opposed to receiving an overall project grade.**[57] Teachers complete online grading rubrics to assess each project.[58]

In addition to presentations, students create comprehensive online portfolios, selecting work that demonstrates competency in each of the eight focus areas. For example, a student's page may include content work, with examples of papers or PowerPoint presentations created for math or Spanish classes; career-related products, such as letters of recommendation, cover letters, and a resume; and pieces that highlight their learning outcomes, such as oral or written communication or citizenship and ethics.[59]

New Technology High School leaders emphasize that the school's commitment to applied skills and personal responsibility permeate the school culture inside and outside of the classroom. Students maintain the cleanliness and order of the school and are responsible for managing their time without the assistance of bells that signal the beginning and end of classes.[60] The unique curriculum and approach to student freedom has significant investments in teacher professional development and curriculum design.[61]

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[54] "Mission of New Technology High School." New Technology High School. http://www.nths.nvusd.k12.ca.us/Website2007/about-vision-mission-core-values.html
[55] Pearlman, B. "Students Thrive on Cooperation and Problem Solving." Edutopia, 18 October 2006. http://www.edutopia.org/new-skills-new-century
[56] Barseghian, T. "Napa New Tech High: 5 Reasons this is the School of the Future." Huffington Post Online, 7 January 2011. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tina-barseghian/napa-new-tech-high-5-reas_b_805972.html
[57] Pearlman, Op. cit.
[58] Barseghian, Op. cit.
[59] "Student Portfolios." New Technology High School. http://www.nths.nvusd.k12.ca.us/Website2007/portfolios_10.html
[60] "About Us." New Technology High School. http://newtechhigh.org/?page_id=573
[61] Barseghian, Op. cit.

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