

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES 21st Century Skills and the Reauthorization of NCLB/ESEA

The Partnership believes that our organization's framework for 21st century skills is consistent with the metrics and accountability emphasized in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. As congress considers reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), of which NCLB is the current version, we offer this set of principles to provide guidance for strengthening the Act in terms of its approach to accountability and integrating 21st century skills for today's students.

The Case for 21st Century Education:

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, representing both business and education, believes success of US education in the 21st century depends upon student acquisition of 21st century skills because:

- **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.
- **Competition is changing internationally.** Innovation and creativity no longer set U.S. education apart. Innovators around the world rival Americans in breakthroughs that fuel economic competitiveness.
- **The workplace, jobs and skill demands are changing.** Today *every* student, whether he/she plans to go directly into the workforce or on to a 4-year college or trade school, 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 (ICT) literacy

- Life skills: leadership, ethics, accountability, adaptability, personal productivity, personal responsibility, people skills, self-direction, and social responsibility

P21 Principles Regarding NCLB

These principles are intended to provide guidance for strengthening NCLB's approach to accountability and integration of 21st century skills into classrooms.

Principle 1: Standards

Standards that reflect content mastery alone do not enable accountability and measurement of 21st century skills. And without a comprehensive, valid system of measurement, it is impossible to integrate these skills effectively into classroom instruction or monitor whether students have mastered the skills necessary for success in life and work today. The Partnership believes the Act should:

- Include language related to the integration of 21st century skills into state standards of the three subjects already identified by the Act (math, reading, science.)
- Incorporate "21st century skills" as part of the definition/description of "challenging academic content standards."
- Funds should be provided to states for development of robust standards that incorporate 21st century skills into core subjects, as well as 21st century content areas not currently covered by federal testing.
- States should be supported in collaborating with other states to develop 21st century standards.
- States should be supported if they choose to strengthen their standards to improve their students' abilities to compete in the global economy.

Principle 2: Assessment

An expanded approach to assessment, involving measurements that assess 21st century skills, is necessary to ensure accountability of schools in the 21st century. 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. Standardized achievement assessments alone do not generate evidence of the skill sets that the business and education communities believe are necessary to ensure success in the 21st century. The Partnership recommends the following improvements to ESEA:

- The assessment and accountability system should be based on multiple measures of students' abilities that include 21st century skills. In addition to statewide standardized assessments, such measures could include district

level assessments, local school and classroom formative assessments, and other measures of student knowledge.

- Assessment of 21st century skills should be listed as an integral part of the academic assessments in math, reading and science.
- Reporting requirements should be expanded to include information on whether the student is achieving 21st century skills.
- Funds should be made available for pilot projects and test beds for the use of assessments that measure 21st century skill competencies in high school students.
- Funds should be allocated for an international benchmarking project that allows U.S. high school students to be compared to their international peers in terms of competencies in 21st century skills.

Principle 3: Professional Development

Students cannot master 21st century skills unless their teachers are well trained and supported in this type of instruction. The Act should support professional development that prepares teachers and principals to integrate 21st century skills into their classrooms and schools. Specifically, the Partnership recommends that:

- Funds should be allocated for professional development of 21st century skills and establishment of 21st Century Skills Teaching Academies.
- Higher education institutions should be supported in identifying and disseminating the best practices for teaching and assessing 21st century skills
- Higher education institutions should be encouraged to ensure that all pre-service teachers graduate prepared to employ 21st century teaching and assessment strategies in their classrooms.

Principle 4: Information and communications technology (ICT) literacy

ICT literacy is the ability to use technology to develop 21st century content, knowledge and skills. Students must be able to use technology to help them learn content and skills—so that they know *how* to learn, think critically, solve problems, use information, communicate, innovate and collaborate. The Partnership recommends that ESEA integrate ICT literacy in the following way:

- Maintain and fund the Enhancing Education Through Technology State Grant program.
- Transition the 8th grade technology literacy requirement into an ICT literacy requirement, so that the focus is not on technology competency, but the ability to use technology to perform critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, communication and innovation skills.

Principle 5: Content

Twenty-first century content areas like global awareness, financial literacy, civic literacy and health awareness are critical to student success in communities and

workplaces, yet they typically are not emphasized in schools today. The Partnership believes the Act should:

- Support the teaching of each of these content areas.
- For global awareness in particular, support the teaching of multiple languages.

Principle 6: Research & Development

Targeted, sustained investment in research and development initiatives is required to promote 21st century skills and craft teaching practices and assessment approaches that more closely convey and measure what students need to excel in the 21st century. Therefore the Partnership recommends:

- The Act should provide support for state research and development initiatives, within the state university system and/or possibly others, that will identify through scientifically-based research the best practices for teaching, attaining and measuring 21st century skills.

Principle 7: 21st Century Skills Definition

The Partnership recognizes that the term “21st century skills” is used in a variety of contexts. Therefore we recommend:

- ESEA should contain a definition of “21st century skills” with a current description of the P21 framework as described earlier in this document.

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