

21st Century Skills in Louisiana



The Department of Education, the Governor's Office, government agencies, and other entities throughout Louisiana are committed to fusing the three Rs and the four Cs (creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration) for its 650,000 students by strengthening its 21st century support systems available. Louisiana recognizes that it can only do this through extensive collaboration and effective coordination of resources.

Louisiana's governmental agencies seek to unite forces rather than function as disjointed, unfocused, and under-funded entities. Alignment of state agencies is integral to the effective systemic reform that will resolve the workforce crisis which currently has a stranglehold on Louisiana's economy.

To promote this alignment, Louisiana's governor formed a cross-agency team charged with developing a strategic plan to resolve the workforce crisis. After extensive research, education reform surfaced as the foundation for addressing this vital issue.

A commitment to 21st century standards

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) is working to better fuse the three Rs and four Cs in its Standards, Benchmarks, and Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs) through a comprehensive process of review and revision of content standards. One major focus of the Standards Advisory Committee was to review the Foundation Skills and Competencies (from the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills/SCANS, 1992), which are included in the current standards. The discussion centered on making skills more apparent, reportable and measurable in the revised standards. The discussion also focused on ways to ensure instruction addresses how students acquire these skills, as well as on ways for students to demonstrate and for educators to assess proficiency.

Additionally, the High School Redesign group has begun to compare the content of the Foundation Skills, as outlined in the report by the Louisiana secretary of labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, with the 21st century skills in anticipation of a much deeper and explicit integration of the latter into Louisiana's revised standards. The Standards Advisory Committee also addressed the concerns from business and industry that potential employees often do not adequately possess these skills. Accordingly, the LDE is ensuring that the fusion of the three Rs and four Cs is more evident in the Senior Project, the Entrepreneurship Course, and CTE coursework.

Developing assessments for the 21st century

The LDE recognizes that its accountability and assessment system needs continual revision to remain fair, relevant and informative, and therefore strives to ensure the system remains dynamic. It is increasingly important that the programs of study be relevant and engaging, offer a wide range of graduation pathways to students, and fuse the three Rs and the four Cs to ensure college- and career-readiness.

Although Louisiana has a highly rated assessment system in place, the LDE is currently re-evaluating its assessment protocol and considering a move to criterion-based end-of course tests, performance-based Senior Projects, and a combination of ACT/WorkKeys assessments as

relevant, rigorous measures of student knowledge and skills. In light of the need for relevant and rigorous curriculum and assessment, the LDE is in the process of shifting towards greater emphasis on project-based learning as a measure of college- and career-readiness. The intent is to administer a suite of assessments that measure application of academic knowledge, real-world knowledge and essential skills.

Louisiana's Senior Projects are challenging, requiring significant effort on the part of each student in demonstrating and successfully communicating what the student has learned. A world-class senior project requires students to plan well, to meet deadlines and to manage the project successfully. During the process, students benefit through opportunities to gather information, integrate academic and career/technical studies, develop and demonstrate verbal and nonverbal communication skills, and feel a strong sense of accomplishment for completing a complex, multi-pronged, and relevant project. This exciting program is a strong example of how Louisiana is updating its assessment system to better measure content and skills acquisition.

A plan for providing 21st century professional development

Recognizing the importance of professional development for teachers and students, the LDE increasingly embeds professional development in many of its programs. The LDE recently added several full-time staff members responsible for both facilitating and conducting professional development throughout the state. Louisiana Virtual School (LVS) provides opportunities for teachers to participate in online professional development, particularly in Algebra I and English II. Ongoing professional development in Career Technical Education (CTE) courses take place throughout the school year.

A key aspect of Louisiana's plan is to enhance the Literacy and Numeracy initiative to encompass professional development of teaching methods that include expanded literacy (e.g., ICT) and applied numeracy across all content areas and all grade levels.

THE PARTNERSHIP FOR 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is a national organization that advocates for 21st century readiness for every student. As the United States 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 keep up by fusing the three Rs and the four Cs (such as critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation). While leading districts and schools are already doing this, P21 advocates for local, state and federal policies that support this approach for every school.