



Framework for High Performing 21st Century Middle Level Schools

“Learning for All . . . Whatever It Takes”

*West Virginia Department of Education
21st Century Implementation Model*

“The well-being of the nation increasingly depends upon U.S. high schools rising to the challenge of preparing ALL students for a new economic reality.”

-U.S. Department of Education Spokesperson

“There are countless ways of achieving greatness, but any road to achieving one’s maximum potential must be built on a bedrock of respect for the individual, a commitment to excellence and a rejection of mediocrity.”

-Unknown

Draft



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Foreword

For nearly three decades, the improvement of public education has been a centerpiece of America's political agenda. Starting with *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (April, 1984) and most recently with *No Child Left Behind*, policy makers have grappled with how to bring about significant reform in public schools. Although progress has been made, many schools and school systems lag behind expected results. Morale among some educators has suffered; faced with greater and greater demands and more top-down initiatives, some voice a loss of pride and sense of efficacy in the very profession they love.

The compelling need to improve schools and school systems is certain. Although we are graduating more students from high school, better meeting the needs of students with disabilities and sending a higher percentage of students off to post-secondary education, the need for graduates with higher levels of knowledge and skill has outdistanced our ability to produce these results. In the 1950's it was appropriate for only top students to transition to post-secondary education. Today, essentially all students must be prepared for some type of post-secondary credential: skilled certificate, two-year or four-year diploma. The competition for jobs of the future brought about by economic globalization and digital technology make the ability to think and create the true currency of the 21st century.

How does the West Virginia public school system meet these demands? I propose three initiatives. First, we must refine our vision of the graduates we are to produce. Certainly, we must assure the basics of literacy and numeracy for all students. But, we must also develop students who are competent in the ability to think critically, to apply knowledge at high levels and use technology tools to assemble, communicate and analyze information. Second, we must develop a statewide approach to improvement that taps the creativity and enthusiasm of our talented educators. Given the appropriate conditions for collaboration and professional learning, West Virginia educators will rise to the occasion. This approach must involve time to meet and plan and use the sound processes of continuous improvement and systemic change. Third, we must align our vision across all stakeholders and remove the barriers to change. Disparate political agendas, development of conflicting policies and codes and resistance to basic structural change are barriers to true systemic reform.

The *Framework for 21st Century School Systems* and the companion *Frameworks for 21st Century Schools* and *Frameworks for 21st Century Classrooms* are the foundation for these three proposals. These documents are the basis for a common language and a common vision of the culture, processes and practices of a great school system. It is my hope that they will become the guide for actions of schools and school systems throughout the state. The concepts embedded in these documents, if applied with the West Virginia spirit of optimism and determination will not only unify our efforts and direct our action, but they will allow us to serve our students in a way that they deserve: prepared for success in the 21st century.

Sincerely,

Dr. Steven L. Paine
State Superintendent of Schools

Rationale

Framework for 21st Century

Middle Level Schools

There is no single recipe that prescribes how to become a high performing middle level school. Nor is there a single exhaustive list of all the “ingredients.” Improvement is highly contextual, dependent on the coming together of many factors. Policy makers have tried for decades to improve the quality of public education through prescriptions, primarily through measures that increase accountability and define such things as graduation requirements, curriculum standards and assessment procedures. Although progress has been made, most would agree that many schools have a long way to go to meet the academic rigor and the overall equity standard of “learning for all” necessary for success in the 21st Century.

What then can be done to significantly improve schools? Schools operate as part of a system. As such, they are heavily influenced by the culture, practices and processes of their state and local school district. Some of the very structural changes needed to improve middle level schools are outside of their immediate control. In some cases, improvement requires resources, policy changes and flexibility that are controlled by the local board of education and through state and federal policies. Certainly, there are “outlier” schools that defy the odds and bring about tremendous results for students. These schools have been studied over the decades and characteristics reported in the effective schools research.

To bring about wide scale improvement and to meet the new mission of “Learning for All,” there must be true systemic change. This means aligning the efforts of the state education agencies, local school districts and, of course, principals and teachers toward (1) common agreement of the results to be produced and (2) the structures and processes necessary for achieving those results. *The Framework for 21st Century Middle Level Schools* is intended to define the middle level school’s unique role in systemic change. This Framework aligns with the district document, *Framework for 21st Century School Systems*, and describes conclusions from researching the country’s best middle level schools and from reviewing the recommendations of several national and state reports on improving middle level schools in America.

This document can be a valuable tool for middle level administrators and teachers. First, it can create a vivid mental picture of how high performing middle level schools operate. Thus, it can be a basis for principals and teachers to analyze their own culture, practices and processes. Second, it can set the stage for middle level school staffs to work cooperatively with their local board of education and central office staff to restructure the school and change policies and procedures that may be impeding results. Third, it can align the district and school vision on the practices that need to be implemented thus preventing the “top-down” feeling that schools often have. Finally, it can be a basis for designing professional development at the local, regional and state level. Using this united and systemic approach, West Virginia middle level schools will move forward and perhaps lead the nation in producing graduates who are post-secondary ready and who have the skills necessary to find a productive place in the global digital society of the 21st century.

The 21st Century School

“A simple question to ask is ‘How has the world of a child changed in the last 150 years?’ And the answer is ‘It’s hard to imagine any way in which it hasn’t changed.’ Children know more about what is going on in the world today than their teachers often because of the media environment they grow up in. They are immersed in a media environment of all kinds of stuff that was unheard of 150 years ago, and yet, if you look at school today versus 100 years ago, they are more similar than dissimilar.”

- Peter Senge, Senior Lecturer, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

The Urgency

The world in which students live has changed dramatically and schools must change as well. According to former Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan, there will be an evolving demand for 21st century skills in our economy: “Workers in many occupations are being asked to strengthen their cognitive skills; basic credentials, by themselves, are not enough to ensure success in the workplace. Workers must be equipped not simply with technical know-how but also with the ability to create, analyze and transform information and to interact effectively with others. Moreover, that learning will increasingly be a life-long activity.” As educators, we must prepare students for this kind of world.

The Characteristics

The characteristics of 21st century schools consist of the *content and tools* of teaching and also involve a philosophy about the *way students should be taught and the student’s responsibility* in the learning process. A 21st century school looks at the broader economic, demographic and social trends in the state, the nation and the world and tries to understand the context of the education they are providing. Whether the setting is rural like West Virginia or more suburban, these schools realize students need a curriculum built on the basics but one also rich in global awareness; financial, economic, and business literacy; civic literacy; and information and communication technology.

But being a 21st century school involves more than changing the curriculum. An effective 21st century school sees the *quality of the instructional process* as key to student success. Thus, basic facts and basic skills are important to the extent that they provide a foundation for understanding of complex issues, to solving problems and to thinking critically and creatively. The instructional process is intentionally designed as a journey to deep understanding and application of that knowledge to relevant issues. This kind of instruction affects the design of instructional strategies, the quality of authentic assessments, the selection of resources and even the setting for instruction.

21st century schools see that increasing numbers of students come to the public schools as “digital natives,” able to navigate sophisticated applications of technology tools. Thus, these schools see technology as a way of life. Students beam writing assignments from their Palms to fellow students for peer editing, they routinely prepare PowerPoint presentations, upload scientific data into graphing calculators for mathematical analysis, download graphics or video stream for assignments and even may interview a NASA scientist over the Internet. Guided use of these tools brings richness of understanding, relevance and creative energy into the school and classroom.

However, the most pronounced characteristic of the 21st century school is its view of the learner. Students living in a world constantly changed by technology must be life-long learners. Thus, 21st Century schools focus on creating learners who are active and self-directed; who are given help in understanding their own learning styles; who are given choices in the learning process and clear guidance through rubrics on how to judge the quality of their own work. The 21st century school is truly about creating a community of learners, where students are guided partners in the learning process.

Mission of the Middle Level School

During grades 5-8, the middle level learner, typically a young adolescent 10 – 15 years of age, is experiencing a change from a small neighborhood school, where the student spends most of the day in one primary classroom with the same teacher and classmates, to a larger, more impersonal institution, farther from home, with many different classes and teachers. This is also a time when the learners have unique developmental characteristics and varied abilities that must be considered when designing appropriate learning experiences.

THE MIDDLE LEVEL LEARNER

Young adolescents

- are searching for identity and acceptance from peers; they want to belong;
- think, observe and judge things and situations in relation to self (egocentric);
- have a willingness to learn new things they consider to be useful, appreciate opportunities to use skills to solve real-life problems and prefer active over passive learning experiences;
- are curious about their world and want opportunities to explore and extend their knowledge;
- are reflective and introspective in thoughts and feelings;
- are self-conscious, highly sensitive to criticism, susceptible to feelings of low self-esteem and respond well to opportunities for success and authentic recognition;
- are idealistic and possess a strong sense of fairness;
- want to make their own decisions and require consistency and direction as they learn to do so;
- are often erratic and inconsistent in behavior; and
- experience fluctuations in metabolism, causing restlessness and listlessness, and rapid and sporadic physical development, requiring varied activities and time to be by themselves.

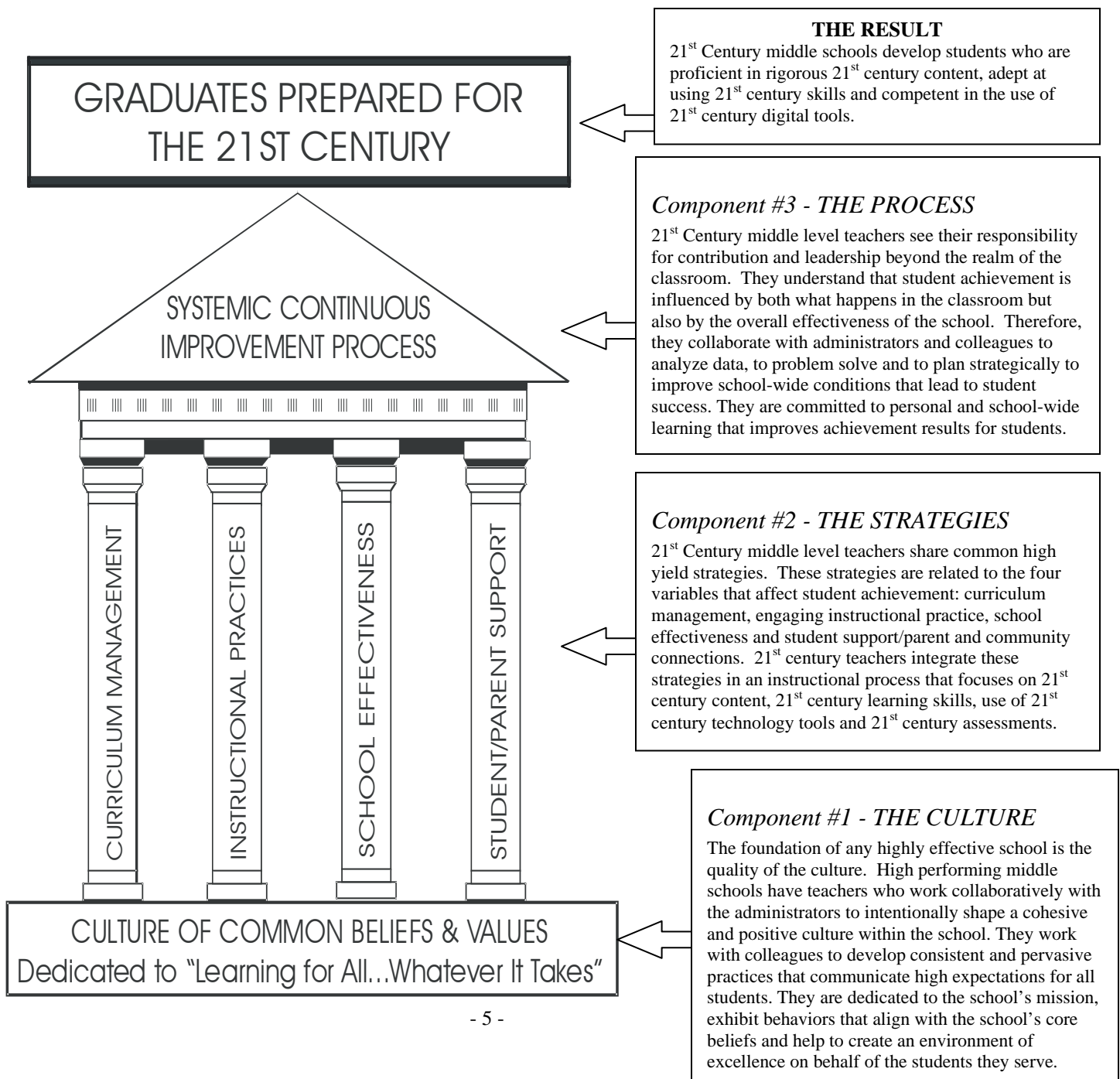
THE MISSION

Based upon the characteristics of the middle level learner and the *Framework for 21st Century Middle Level Schools*, the mission of the West Virginia middle level school is to create an environment dedicated to academic rigor for all students, where expectations are high and support is strong; to promote students' efficacy as learners; to develop their 21st century learning skills and responsibility for achievement; to guide them through the personal issues of early adolescence and build the foundation for high school and post-secondary choices.

Framework Overview

The Three Components of a 21st Century Middle Level School

High performing middle level schools have in common three broad components (illustrated by the graphic below) that come together to produce quality results for students. First, they have a cohesive culture of high expectations for students and staff. Second, they share similar strategies in curriculum management, instructional practices, school effectiveness and student/parent support. Third, the staff has a personal and organizational commitment to systemic continuous improvement



Component 1

The Culture of a 21st Century

Middle Level School

The foundation of any highly effective school is the quality of the culture. Generally defined as “the way we do things around here,” culture is the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions and rituals that have built up over time as people work together, solve problems and confront challenges. These expectations and values shape how people think, feel and act in schools. Culture influences everything that goes on in schools: how staff dress, what they talk about, their willingness to change, the practice of instruction and the emphasis given student and faculty learning. Thus, culture is a powerful determinant of results and the degree to which school leaders attend to this determinant will ultimately shape the school’s ability to improve.

Low performing schools have a significantly different culture than high performing schools. They value different things and thus behave in different ways than their high performing counterparts. These schools have, over time, become unproductive and toxic. These are schools where staffs are extremely fragmented, where the purpose of serving students has been lost to the goal of serving the adults, where negative values and hopelessness reign. Teachers who support change describe improvement meetings as battlegrounds where snipers and attacks are the norm. Negative staff effectively sabotage any attempts at collegial improvement. Toxic schools are places where negativity dominates conversations, interactions and planning -- where the only stories recounted are of failure; the only heroes are anti-heroes.

In contrast to the toxic culture of low performing schools, high performing middle level schools have strong, positive cultures. These are schools

- where staff have a shared sense of purpose, where they pour their hearts into teaching and to doing their best to successfully transition all students from elementary through middle level to high school;
- where the underlying norms are of collegiality, improvement and hard work; the staff feel an obligation to improve their skills and to be a contributing partner in solving school problems;
- where rituals and traditions celebrate student accomplishment, teacher innovation and parental community commitments;
- where the informal network of storytellers, heroes and heroines provide a social web of information, support and history of successful ways that the school has served the needs of students; and
- where success, joy and humor abound.

Strong positive cultures are places with a shared sense of what is important, a shared ethos of caring and concern, and a shared commitment to helping students become productive contributors and learners in the 21st century.

The above descriptions are paraphrased from the work of Kent D. Peterson and Terrence E. Deal, *How Leaders Influence the Culture of Schools*.

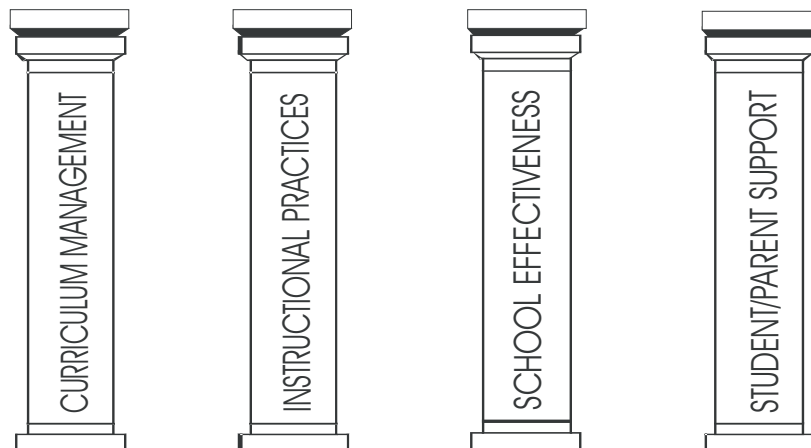
Component 2

High Yield Practices of the 21st Century Middle Level School “The Four Pillars”

When determining strategies to improve classroom, school and school system effectiveness, professionals must answer one pivotal question: “What affects overall student achievement?” Or phrased in improvement terms, “What conditions do we control that can be **altered** to improve student achievement?” When answered, nearly all issues related to student achievement derive from four broad areas: (1) the quality of curriculum, “What we teach”; (2) the quality of instruction, “How we teach”; (3) the overall effectiveness of school, “Where we teach”; and (4) the unique characteristics and backgrounds of the students and the support of their families, “Who we teach.” The quality of each area in a school or school system can either enhance or negate the overall level of student performance. Together these four variables provide a clear organizational model for classroom, school and school system improvement.

A review of research and best practices of high performing schools (informed with recommendations from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills) reveals significant commonalities among the practices of America’s best schools. Teachers that are closing the achievement gap, bringing increasing numbers of students to high levels of performance and using methods associated with 21st century learning *share many similar approaches*. Though different in specific detail and application, high performing classroom teachers understand and manage the curriculum, know how to design, implement and assess meaningful and engaging learning experiences, contribute to the overall effectiveness of the school, create and/or participate in support systems for students and connect with parents and community in a meaningful way.

The charts on the following pages use these four areas as an organizational structure for displaying “high yield practices” common among high performing teachers. The charts provide a very brief description of each high yield practice; further definitions and explanations of these practices will appear in documents being designed to accompany this Framework.



High Yield Strategies of the 21st Century Middle Level School

CURRICULUM	INSTRUCTION
<p>Implement a rigorous standards-based curriculum (rather than a textbook or activities based approach) focused on proficiency of WVCSOs and 21st century content, context, learning skills and technology tools</p> <p>Use of the district's K-12 prioritized, mapped and customized curriculum, to give priority to core concepts and essential understandings</p> <p>Use of a 21st century balanced assessment system that includes classroom assessments, benchmark assessments and summative assessments to improve student achievement</p> <p>Implement a rigorous 21st century core curriculum that gives priority to reading/language arts and mathematics and provides in-depth development of science, social studies, the arts, health, physical education and foreign languages, with opportunities for students to explore additional curriculum of interest</p> <p>Use of a consistent school-wide writing model based on the writing process with adequate practice in narrative, persuasive, expository and technical styles, and assessed using common rubrics and portfolios</p> <p>Use of a standards-based mathematics program that transitions students from numeracy to a solid foundation in algebra and geometry, using mathematical reasoning, problem solving, valuing mathematics, developing student confidence in mathematics communication, and setting the stage for success in upper levels of mathematics and science</p> <p>School-wide responsibility for 21st century information and communication technologies (ICT) resulting in students' proficiency in the use of digital technology and communication tools to access, manage, integrate and evaluate information, construct new knowledge and communicate with others</p> <p>Use of an articulated advisory curriculum that addresses student personal growth and development, enhances study skills and prepares/guides students for entry into a rigorous high school curriculum and begins the goal setting process for planning secondary and post secondary education and careers</p> <p>Utilization of a school-wide curriculum monitoring system (i.e., classroom walkthrough and assessment data) to promote communication about student learning</p>	<p>Teachers who are developmentally responsive to the physical and social/emotional needs of middle level learners and who have subject matter expertise</p> <p>Expectation that teachers create a caring, trusting, and engaging classroom climate that values all children regardless of gender, race, native language background, culture or disability</p> <p>Expectation that teachers create an inclusive learning environment that is emotionally and physically safe, promotes personal respect and a sense of belonging and conveys to students that they can meet rigorous academic standards</p> <p>Staff agreement on and enforcement of consistent school rules and procedures that help students gain skills and knowledge to be successful with future societal roles in communities and workplaces</p> <p>School-wide agreement on and routine practice of project-based learning, using exemplars and performance/assessment rubrics</p> <p>Expectation that all teachers use a standards-based lesson planning format that "begins with the end in mind," focuses on essential questions and core concepts, aligns assessments, instruction and resources to the WVCSOs and 21st century learning</p> <p>Appropriate and pervasive use of the research-based instructional strategies (e.g., identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note-taking, non-linguistic representations, cooperative learning, advance organizers and generating and testing hypotheses)</p> <p>Focus on 21st century skills that develop student personal dependability, perseverance, reflection, flexibility and self-discipline that learners assimilate into life-long learning</p> <p>Use of 21st century learning strategies across disciplines that result in students gathering and evaluating evidence, identifying viewpoints, making broad connections, considering alternatives and making informed decisions</p> <p>Expectation that teachers gather and use a wide variety of data regarding students' learning profiles, readiness, interest, disability and/or cultural backgrounds to adjust time, support flexible grouping and differentiate instruction</p> <p>Use of a 21st century balanced assessment system throughout teaching and learning to diagnose student needs, plan next steps in instruction and provide students with descriptive feedback they can use to improve the quality of their work</p> <p>Interdisciplinary teaming that results in the collaborative examination of standards, objectives, essential concepts and essential questions so that teachers can identify strategies for instruction and assessment that align horizontally and vertically</p> <p>Classrooms are "word rich" environments with priority given to teaching reading strategies and vocabulary development in all content areas as demonstrated by extensive reading, explicit teaching, modeling, and repetitive exposure to words in multiple ways</p> <p>Use of a school-wide formalized instructional monitoring system to assure that the instructional and curriculum priorities are being addressed</p>

High Yield Strategies of the 21st Century Middle Level School

SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS	STUDENT SUPPORT/PARENT CONNECTIONS
<p>School-wide agreed upon and shared mission that unites the staff and guides actions, policies and procedures throughout the school</p> <p>Collaborative school culture that provides collective responsibility and ownership for academic excellence, developmental responsiveness and social equity</p> <p>Culture based on high standards for staff and students, where staff models professionalism in dress, language and demeanor and their interactions with students, colleagues, and community</p> <p>Principal who personifies a “leader of learning ” by demonstrating an understanding of the unique characteristics of middle level learners</p> <p>Principal and staff who demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning (i.e., professional learning communities)</p> <p>School-wide knowledge of research on effective schools and how the research is applied to middle level learning (i.e., using both internal and external multiple data sources)</p> <p>Collaborative school improvement process (school strategic plan) supported by all staff that focuses on systemic change and targets improvement of student learning</p> <p>Principal who is a “developer of people,” and organizes a school-wide structure for on-going professional growth to enhance the knowledge and skills of staff which results in improved student achievement</p> <p>Development of school schedules that facilitate common planning time; creatively set aside time for staff collaborative problem-solving, planning, learning and decision-making; and judiciously protect learning time and meet the needs of learners in the school</p> <p>On-going evaluation of staffing assignments to assure the most effective use of all personnel, time and space in meeting the needs of the learners</p> <p>Principal who is proactive in securing resources to support 21st century student learning, providing staff with the technological and subject specific tools they need and blending resources to accomplish the mission and goals of the school</p>	<p>Proactive effort to identify and remove barriers that might exclude students and parents from participation in the school community</p> <p>School-wide environment that develops and promotes healthy lifestyles and personal wellness and enlists families as partners in this effort</p> <p>Wide variety of student support systems emphasizing collaboration including consultation, teaming, co-teaching, informal problem solving, instruction in a separate setting and collegial learning communities</p> <p>Formalized school structure and processes to provide all students on-going support and guidance (e.g., academic success, goal setting, career planning and personal growth) with an adult advocate, advisor or mentor</p> <p>Implement policies, procedures and programs that develop students’ respect for cultural, gender and socio-economic differences that prepares them for living in a 21st century global society</p> <p>Implement personalized guidance and scheduling processes that guide students in choosing a rigorous class schedule</p> <p>All students are encouraged to participate in co-curricular and extra curricular opportunities regardless of economical or social barriers</p> <p>Proactive initiative to build the capacity of parents to support their child’s learning at home</p> <p>School-wide commitment to effective two-way communication with parents that is respectful of the diverse backgrounds and unique and challenging needs of families</p> <p>Implement an effective transition plan that involves students, parents, teachers and staff from all schools participating in the transition process both into and out of the middle level school</p> <p>An inviting atmosphere pervades the school and promotes its importance as the center of community connectedness</p> <p>Proactive partnerships and relationships within the community that are mutually beneficial, that result in the school being a respected and valued partner, and that expand the school’s ability to meet the needs of students</p> <p>School-wide articulated developmental guidance program that addresses the students social and emotional needs</p>

Descriptions

The Six Elements of 21st Century Learning

1. A FOCUS ON CORE SUBJECTS - Core academic subjects remain the foundation of a good education. No Child Left Behind identifies these as **English, reading and language arts; mathematics; science; foreign languages; civics; government; economics; arts; history; and geography**. Standards, objectives and performance descriptors for each core subject are defined in the WV Content Standards and Objectives. No Child Left Behind also requires that students be **technology literate** by the end of the eighth grade. The focus on core subjects must expand beyond minimal mastery to high levels of understanding and skill. Knowledge, learning skills and use of technology tools must be built on a firm foundation of core subjects.

2. EMPHASIS ON 21st CENTURY CONTENT - Education and business leaders identify four significant, emerging content areas that are critical to success in communities and workplaces of the 21st century. Schools need to give greater prominence in the curriculum to these four areas. This emphasis may come from adding additional courses to the curriculum or by emphasizing this content in curriculum prioritization and mapping in existing courses. Teachers can add rich understanding of this content by infusing this content in contextual learning experiences. The areas are

GLOBAL AWARENESS - Global awareness promotes understanding, tolerance and acceptance of ethnic, cultural, religious and personal differences. It also helps students work through the complexities of different points of view that spring from different parts of the world. Technology is obliterating geographic boundaries and time zones; collaboration and communication across these boundaries is now commonplace. Students need a deeper understanding of the thinking, motivations and actions of different cultures, countries and regions.

FINANCIAL, ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS LITERACY - Students are and will increasingly be responsible for making sophisticated economic and business choices that will profoundly affect their future. These everyday choices can result in personal prosperity or poor financial decisions. Similarly, most people enter work places after high school without even a rudimentary understanding of various business processes, entrepreneurial spirit or economic forces that shape our lives. Financial, economic and business literacy will help students better manage their personal finances and contribute more productively in workplaces.

CIVIC LITERACY - The United States needs informed, responsible citizens to participate in the political process. Civic literacy can help students understand, analyze and participate in government and in the community both globally and locally.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS AWARENESS – Being a successful citizen and worker in the 21st century requires knowledge and habits that contribute to personal health. With increasing costs in medical care and health insurance and the personal impact on happiness and well-being, students must understand the importance of healthy lifestyles.

Adapted from publications of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills

www.21stcenturyskills.org

Descriptions (Continued)

The Six Elements of 21st Century Learning

3. 21st CENTURY CONTEXT - Good teachers have always helped students discover the value and relevance of new skills and knowledge. Because children now live in a world of almost unlimited streams of trivial and profound information, of enormous opportunity and difficult choices, helping students make vital practical, emotional and social connections to skill and content is more important than ever. To help students make these meaningful connections, teachers can create a 21st century context for learning by

- Making content relevant to students' lives;
- Bringing the world into the classroom;
- Taking students out into the world; and
- Creating opportunities for students to interact with each other, with teachers and other knowledgeable adults in authentic learning experiences.

In these ways, students can see the connections between their schoolwork and their lives outside the classroom, now and in the future. These connections are critical to developing students' engagement, motivation and attitudes about learning.

By teaching in a 21st century context, educators can create a balanced education that reflects both national concerns and local needs.

4. USING 21st CENTURY TECHNOLOGY TOOLS TO GAIN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

(ICT) LITERACY - Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy is the ability to use technology to develop 21st century context knowledge and learning skills, in support of 21st century teaching and learning. In a digital world, students need to learn to use the tools that are essential to everyday life and workplace productivity. The West Virginia Content Standards and Objectives have been revised to integrate 21st century learning skills with 21st century technology tools, using national technology standards. In West Virginia these will be entitled, "Standards for 21st Century Learning." Important 21st century technology tools include

- Information and communication technologies such as computers, networking and other technologies (electronic probes, ipods, electronic white boards, etc.);
- Audio, video, multimedia and other digital tools;
- Access to online learning communities and resources; and
- Aligned digital content, software and adequate hardware for all students and educators with appropriate technology support systems.

The mix of technology tools will change and evolve rapidly in the future. Today's technology may be obsolete tomorrow. It is impossible to predict the tools that will be essential for learning and working in the years to come. This is why it is important for people to acquire the learning skills that will enable them to learn to use next-generation technology and why businesspeople and educators need to continue collaborating so schools will stay abreast of new technology.

Adapted from publications of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills

www.21stcenturyskills.org

Descriptions (Continued)

The Six Elements of 21st Century Learning

5. 21st CENTURY ASSESSMENTS - A 21st century balanced assessment system includes a combination of **summative assessments**, **benchmark assessments** and formative **classroom assessments**. Professionals at all levels must evaluate and implement assessments based on their intended purpose and appropriate use. All assessments provide evidence of student learning that must be clearly communicated to the intended users in order to assure student success. Assessments in the 21st century must measure higher order thinking and reasoning through the use of authentic performance based measures. Twenty-first century assessments will increasingly utilize technology as a means of test administration, reporting, record keeping and monitoring student progress.

Summative Assessments of Learning

Summative assessments must be appropriately balanced with benchmark assessments and formative classroom assessments to adequately evaluate the full range of student proficiency. Summative assessments in the 21st century are guided by the following characteristics:

- Summative assessments measure core subjects aligned to the WV Content Standards and Objectives that include 21st century content, learning skills and tools.
- Summative assessments document individual and group achievement status at a point in time.
- Summative assessments are used for accountability and to inform students, educators, parents and the community of student, school and system performance.

Benchmark Assessments of/for Learning

Benchmark assessments may be formative or summative in nature. They use multiple measures and a variety of instructional and assessment rubrics to guide the assessment process. They are used for instructional feedback, not for accountability purposes. Benchmark assessments in the 21st century are guided by the following characteristics:

- Benchmark assessments are typically administered by the district or school at predetermined points during the instructional process to measure student mastery of specific instructional objectives.
- Benchmark assessments provide feedback to students, teachers, parents, schools and the school system on students' relative progress toward instructional targets.
- Benchmark assessments provide timely information that allows "in course" correction before students fall hopelessly behind.

Formative Classroom Assessments for Learning

As an integral part of the instructional cycle, formative classroom assessments provide students, teachers and parents with a continuing stream of evidence of student progress in mastering the knowledge and skills that build toward standards. Formative classroom assessments in the 21st century are guided by the following characteristics:

- Formative classroom assessments are conducted throughout teaching and learning to diagnose student needs, plan next steps in instruction and provide students with feedback they can use to improve the quality of their work.
- Classroom assessments are learner-centered, rooted in effective teaching strategies, context-specific and support ongoing student growth.
- Formative assessment information is clearly communicated and provides feedback to students and their parents for monitoring student progress toward achieving learning goals.
- Formative assessments are increasingly authentic in nature and include multiple performance based measures.

Adapted from publications of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills

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Descriptions (Continued)

The Six Elements of 21st Century Learning

6. 21st CENTURY LEARNING SKILLS

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS	<p>INFORMATION AND MEDIA LITERACY The understanding of how words, images, and sounds influence the way meanings are created, shared and analyzed in a contemporary society so that a person can assign value, worth and meaning to information through a variety of media forms.</p> <p>VISUAL LITERACY The ability to interpret, use, appreciate, and create images and video using both conventional and 21st century media in ways that advance thinking, decision-making, communication and learning.</p> <p>COMMUNICATION SKILLS The skills needed to generate and convey messages with meaning and understanding within and across various contexts, cultures and media.</p>
THINKING AND REASONING SKILLS	<p>CRITICAL THINKING The clear, precise, and purposeful process of using specific cognitive skills and strategies to guide belief and action in accomplishing goals.</p> <p>SYSTEMS THINKING The ability to see and understand the whole, recognize patterns and interrelationships of parts, and determine how to structure those interrelationships in more effective, efficient ways.</p> <p>PROBLEM SOLVING The ability to apply appropriate processes including problem identification, information gathering, problem analysis, generating and testing alternate solutions, and evaluating results in order to generate resolutions to problems.</p> <p>CREATING AND INNOVATING The act of bringing an idea, product or performance into existence that is genuinely new, original and of value either personally and/or culturally.</p>
PERSONAL AND WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY SKILLS	<p>INTERPERSONAL AND COLLABORATION SKILLS The ability to read and manage the emotions, motivations, and behaviors of oneself and others during social interactions or in a social-interactive context. Collaboration means cooperative interaction between two or more individuals working together to solve problems, create novel products or learn and master content.</p> <p>SELF-DIRECTION The ability to set goals, plan for achievement, initiate action, manage time and effort and independently monitor and assess one's own effort.</p> <p>ADAPTABILITY The ability to modify one's thinking, attitudes, or behaviors to be better suited to current or future environments, as well as the ability to handle multiple goals, tasks, and inputs with understanding and adhering to constraints of time, resources and systems.</p> <p>ETHICAL BEHAVIOR The ability to act with integrity according to the principles of right and/or moral conduct.</p> <p>SOCIAL/PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY The acceptance of responsibility for personal actions, including responsibility for learning and initiating or supporting actions that resolve issues in the interest of the common good.</p> <p>LEADERSHIP The process of influence or example by which an individual induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers.</p> <p>PROJECT PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT The ability to organize to achieve the goals of a specific initiative or problem with efficiency and effectiveness.</p>

Adapted from publications of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills
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Component 3

Systemic Continuous Improvement Process

High performing schools share not only common strategies for change, but also share common methods for bringing about that change. They have a basic commitment to “everyone getting better all the time” in order to improve results for students. They have a defined collaborative improvement process, embedded and organized into the life of the school. They set aside time to study a variety of student data, to identify needs, to study possible strategies and set forth an action plan based on a cycle of “plan, do, study, act.” Described below are common concepts embedded in the high performing school’s improvement process.

- 1. Transformational leadership that creates a “learning-centered” system**
Leaders center the operation of the school on improvement of learning for all students. Furthermore, they create an environment where staff learning and staff leadership are valued and supported.
- 2. An expectation that change will be an on-going continuous process**
Staff feels an obligation to refine and improve their skills and knowledge; they see collaborative efforts to improve the school as an essential part of school life.
- 3. Identification of core beliefs that drive improvement efforts**
Staff has reached consensus on the core beliefs that drive individual and organization actions. These beliefs are the basis of a cohesive school culture.
- 4. A well-articulated mission that includes a focus on learning for all**
There is a school-wide sense of shared mission that unites the staff, guides all actions, and vividly defines what is to be accomplished for students.
- 5. A broad understanding of and commitment to change based on internal and external factors**
Staff has an enduring commitment to examining trend information in the school, community, state and nation to assure an appropriate vision and mission for the school.
- 6. Pervasive use of data both to target and to refine improvement efforts**
Staff tracks a variety of student data using many sources for determining student success; data, rather than “gut feeling,” drives the actions of staff.
- 7. Change initiatives and processes that address the “interrelatedness” of activities and resources**
Leadership considers how the change will impact other operations and resources in the school and plans accordingly.
- 8. An implementation process that reflects the cycle of “plan, do, study, act”**
The school does not look for “quick fixes;” the staff stays the course in institutionalizing new practice, refining initiatives until they become satisfied with results.
- 9. A collaboratively developed strategic plan focused on results**
The strategic plan is a “living” document, important to the staff of the school, and targets the long-term improvement activities of the school.

Reflections: Nurturing A Collaborative Spirit

In West Virginia, we have a history of facing challenges with great commitment and determination. Born from conflict, our state has been the site of great battles and great tragedies. Rugged terrain, economic instability, and rural isolation have all played a role in our collective experience. Certainly, most would find these daunting. But to West Virginians, they define and shape our character. We are people who understand “uphill” battles, who make the most of scarce resources and who have learned to care for and depend on each other. It is with this spirit and character that we will face the challenges of a new era in education.

The fundamental mission of public schools has changed. From “Learning for Some” to “Learning for All,” the new federal accountability standards require that all students master the essential curriculum regardless of race, ethnicity, poverty, disability, or language deficits. This legislation establishes a clear mandate: every student not only has the right to go to school, but also has the right to exit with the knowledge and skills necessary for productive citizenry.

Whether one agrees with the specifics of the accountability standards or not, two facts remain clear: (1) accountability for both quality and equity in student achievement will certainly continue, and (2) there are increasing numbers of schools and school systems that have been able to bring all students to mastery or beyond. If you can build one, you can build more than one. Thus, it seems prudent to learn from these school systems and to apply their experiences, as appropriate, to our own.

As we begin this collective journey to build a school system responsive to all students, perhaps our greatest resource will be each other. Though we can learn from those outside our borders, we must also commit to greater collaboration and less competition within our borders. We have a common focus, a common school improvement language and a common framework; surely then, our collective wisdom and experience can chart the way for collective success. We are not strangers to great challenges. West Virginians are people of great hope, great determination and great heart. Together, we can continue to build a great school system that assures the best for the students we serve.

Building a Common Language for School Improvement

An integral part of any change process is effective communication. Many terms used in the Framework for High Performing School Systems may be new to staff; others may have unique “working definitions” written by the Consensus Committee to align with West Virginia Board of Education policies or recommendations. The following list represents terms frequently used in the Framework document and other supporting resources.

1. **Benchmarks** - Pre-determined points during the instructional term when student mastery of specific instructional objectives is assessed
2. **Classroom Walkthrough** - A non-evaluative but focused classroom observation made for a brief period of time (3-5 minutes) to observe specific classroom practices; the Walkthrough observation is used to enhance reflective practice and to gather school-wide information regarding professional development and school improvement
3. **Continuous Improvement** - A set of activities designed to bring gradual, but continual improvement to a process through constant review and refinement
4. **Correlates of Effective Schools** – The seven characteristics identified from research present in schools able to bring all students to mastery regardless of background factors like poverty, race, gender, or ethnicity: Clear and Focused Mission, Safe Orderly Environment, High Expectations for All, Time On Task/Opportunity to Learn, Strong Instructional Leadership, Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress, and Positive Home/School Partnerships
5. **Curriculum Alignment** - The on-going process of bringing congruence to the written curriculum, taught curriculum, and assessed curriculum so (1) all that is assessed has been taught, and (2) what is taught encompasses the written curriculum
6. **Curriculum Management System** - A series of on-going interrelated activities designed to implement, support, monitor, and evaluate the system curriculum to assure that all students have access to and benefit from an aligned, high quality prioritized, and sequenced curriculum
7. **Curriculum Map** - A graphic representation of the recommended instructional sequence for curriculum objectives during the instructional year and across the grades Pre K-12 which is used as a management tool for enhancing curriculum continuity, communication, and coordination
8. **Curriculum Prioritization** - The local consensus process of assigning relative value to curriculum objectives in order to make informed instructional decisions about the amount of time allocated to an objective and the degree to which it is an instructional focus
Note: It is recommended that no objective be completely eliminated during the prioritization process
9. **Differentiated Instruction** - A systematic approach to planning curriculum and instruction for academically diverse learners; a blend of whole class, group, and individual instruction, guided by the three principles of differentiation: respectful tasks, flexible grouping, and continual assessment
10. **Effective Schools Research** – The body of research conducted in the early 70’s and 80’s as a response to the Coleman Report which concluded that schools with certain characteristics or “correlates of achievement” can bring all students to mastery levels regardless of student background characteristics
11. **Enduring Understanding** - The big ideas and important concepts that are the heart of the content area and have lasting value and application in the student’s life
12. **Essential Questions** - An expression of inquiry that motivates students to seek broader understanding and deeper meaning of the content objectives
13. **Formative Assessment** - Periodic evaluation of the student’s achievement level of the WV Content Standards and Objectives used to adjust instructional time and strategies so all students will achieve proficiency

14. **High Yield Instructional Strategies** – Categories of instructional activities that have been verified through research to correlate with high student achievement
15. **Instructional Management Practices** – Commonly agreed upon practices within a school for conducting routine tasks in the classroom and organizing the instructional process
16. **Instructional Management System** - A series of on-going interrelated activities designed to implement, support, monitor, and evaluate the system’s instructional process to assure that all students are engaged in and benefiting from the instructional program
17. **Learning Community** – A group of educators within a school or school system that work to create climate that focuses on reflective practice, collegiality, and ongoing professional development targeted toward improvement of student learning
18. **Monitoring System** - An on-going system to collect data on a program, designed to provide feedback on whether the program is fulfilling its functions, addressing the targeted population, and/or producing those services intended; monitoring is different from evaluation; its purpose is to help refine and make “in-course” corrections
19. **Objective** - Grade and subject specific descriptions of the knowledge and skills needed to achieve proficiency of the content standards
20. **Organizational Culture** – The overall pattern of beliefs and values of an organization that (a) manifests itself in policies, procedures, and organizational structures and (b) ultimately shapes the behavior of personnel
21. **Pacing Guide** - A graphic representation or “timeline” illustrating the sequence and amount of time allocated to instructional objectives during the school term
22. **Performance Assessment** - An evaluative method usually judged with a pre-determined rubric that requires students to demonstrate a level of proficiency of the WV Content Standards and Objectives by applying knowledge to authentic tasks such as projects, presentations, activities, exercises, or problem-solving
23. **Performance Descriptors** - Narrative explanations of five levels of student achievement (distinguished, above mastery, mastery, partial mastery, and novice) used by the teacher to assess student attainment of the WV Content Standards and Objectives
24. **Prioritization Criteria** - The basis for assigning relative value to curriculum objectives based on (a) the overall importance for a student’s enduring understanding of the content, (b) the importance of the objective as a prerequisite to the next level of learning, (c) the results of prior assessments of student proficiency, and (d) the value of the objective on high stakes testing
25. **Programmatic Level** – The organization of educational programs and services for delivery to students according to the students’ common developmental characteristics: Early Childhood (Pre-K to Grade 4), Middle Childhood (Grade 5 to Grade 8), and Adolescent Education (Grade 9 to Grade 12)
26. **Proficiency** – The level of student achievement for students who achieve at the “mastery, above mastery, or distinguished” levels
27. **Reading Comprehension** – The degree to which students derive not only the facts from a written passage but the degree to which they gain an understanding of its meaning; when all teachers within a school use techniques to develop comprehension (pre-reading vocabulary development, guiding questions, graphic organizers, jig saw activities, etc.) overall achievement improves
28. **Reflective Practice** – An improvement practice designed to promote the teachers’ self analysis of instructional practice by thoughtfully considering their own classroom practices and comparing the results to those of successful practitioners; reflective practice is often accompanied by coaching from skilled practitioners who guide the reflective process
29. **Rubric** - A pre-determined detailed scoring guide used by teachers to communicate and evaluate levels of student performance of a complex task
30. **School System Transformation** – The rethinking, reorganization, and refocusing of school system organizational structures and expectations to achieve the new mission of “Learning for All”
31. **Standards-Based Curriculum** - A curriculum framework that establishes clear comprehensive exit learning expectations for all students, further defines the expectations

- through specific grade level and subject objectives, and provides performance descriptors for evaluating student level of achievement relative to the WV Content Standards and Objectives
32. **Standards-Based Unit** - Extended instructional sequence involving several lessons of related objectives organized around a broad theme, enduring understanding, or essential question that often culminates in a performance assessment
 33. **Strategic Plan** - A document used by an organization to align its overall operation and budget with organizational priorities, missions, and objectives; a strategic plan should include core beliefs, a mission statement, a description of the agency's long-term goals and evidence of achieving those goals, objectives, strategies or means the organization plans to use to achieve these goals and objectives; the strategic plan may also identify external factors that could affect achievement of long-term goals
 34. **Student Achievement Variables** – The major variables controlled and/or influenced by the school system that impact student achievement; these variables are quality of curriculum, quality of instruction, quality of school organization and environment, and the family background and characteristics of the student
 35. **Support System** - A network of people who interact and remain in communication for mutual assistance; also, resources, activities, and information that enable staff to accomplish assigned responsibilities
 36. **System** – A series of interrelated components designed to achieve a common goal; as applied to a school system, a series of integrated activities, procedures, policies, and professional development designed to achieve a common purpose
 37. **Systemic Change** - Systemic change is change that occurs in all aspects and levels of a system; systemic change requires redesign of fundamental approaches within an organization while considering the effect on all other aspects of the organization
 38. **System-Wide School Improvement Cycle** – A series of steps and/or processes expected within each school to develop and implement the school's strategic plan
 39. **Transformational Leadership** –The ability to affect the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of a significant number of individuals through intentional actions and the creation of a body of work
 40. **Understanding by Design (UbD)** - A three stage instructional planning framework that helps teachers develop quality standards-based lessons that result in student proficiency and enduring understanding
 41. **Values and Beliefs** – The standards or qualities considered worthwhile and desirable by an organization; the statements, principles, or doctrine that the system accepts as true and uses to guide decisions and shape behavior
 42. **Writing to Inform** – Nonfiction writing assignments used to argue, criticize, define, describe, discuss, evaluate, explain, compare and contrast, or summarize topics in the classroom; consistent use of writing to inform assignments in all content areas and consistent judging by a commonly used rubric correlates with high student achievement
 43. **WV Written Curriculum** - The written scope and sequence of what students should know and be able to do as the result of the instructional process as defined by the WV Content Standards and Objectives (also referred to as the essential curriculum)



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