

WHY NOW? WHY US?

5 Key Classroom Strategies to Promote 21st Century Learning for Students With Disabilities

Throughout 2018 and 2019, NCLD worked with 10 charter schools across specific school networks, including Big Picture Learning, Brooklyn LAB, EL Education, High Tech High, and New Tech Network, to examine engaging 21st century learning practices for students with disabilities. We defined 21st century learning as the capacity for students to engage in a transfer of learning—leveraging skills like critical thinking, problem solving, self-advocacy, communication, and collaboration, and dispositions like self-determination and growth mindsets to apply learning from one context to another. Through this collaborative process, we identified five key strategies to promote inclusive 21st century learning:



STRATEGY #1 / EXPANDED STUDENT VOICE AND CHOICE:

Empower students with opportunities to facilitate and lead key meetings and decisions related to their learning and goals.

- A. **Prepare students to facilitate and lead meetings** (Individualized Education Programs, personalized learning plans, 504 plans, transition meetings, and family conferences) that relate to their learning and lives (often through a particular curriculum).
- B. **Emphasize interest-based learning** and allow students to achieve key standards across disciplines through a common theme that they choose themselves.



STRATEGY #2 / POWERFUL, ENGAGING INSTRUCTION:

Provide explicit instruction and intentional learning opportunities inside and outside the school so students have opportunities to develop key knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential to 21st century success through intentional curriculum selection and lesson design processes.

- A. **Provide explicit ongoing instruction on executive functioning, self-advocacy skills, and self-determination** (and associated skills like choice-making and goal-setting), including a deeper understanding of a disability, interpretation of assessment data, and accommodations and interventions.
- B. **Emphasize staff collaboration** through professional development, active participation in professional learning communities, limited teaching loads to enable collaboration, co-teaching between general and special educators, and creation of explicit processes to facilitate community, school, and IEP team collaboration.



STRATEGY #3 / COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS:

De-stigmatize supports and ensure that they address a full range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions by integrating the development of these skills into RTI and MTSS.

- A. **Build small group time (homogeneous or heterogeneous depending on the learning goal) into the master schedule and calendar** so that students can accelerate and receive interventions both in terms of skills and dispositions.
- B. **Emphasize specific supports and interventions for students' development of social and emotional learning** through means such as direct instruction, student advisories, and individual engagement by educators.



STRATEGY #4 / HOLISTIC MEASUREMENT:

Use explicit measures of essential 21st century skills and dispositions so schools and districts can ensure that students understand the measures—and that the measures reflect a more holistic assessment of their success.

- A. **Develop rubrics for key success skills and dispositions** such as critical thinking, collaboration, self-advocacy, and self-determination within student IEP goals.
- B. **Implement holistic data systems empowering collaboration across staff** to capture, track, and share data about student progress so that the benefits of all services and supports are integrated as part of a comprehensive picture of students' experiences.



STRATEGY #5 / EMPOWERING CULTURE:

Facilitate a growth mindset culture in schools so students have the opportunity to see learning as a process rather than an end.

- A. **Provide opportunities for continuous revision** of work and explicitly developing growth mindsets.
- B. **Facilitate an inclusive culture** with a focus on the specific skills and dispositions that relate to that culture within the school through rotations of roles within student teams and an emphasis on principles of Universal Design for Learning.