

# 21ST CENTURY LEARNING IN ACTION



## EXPANDED STUDENT VOICE AND CHOICE

An inclusive, equitable, and empowering school culture will engage students in decision-making, value their choices, and encourage them to take ownership of their trajectory toward independence. This happens when students are invited to contribute to planning discussions related to their learning and goals, and facilitate their own Individualized Education Program (IEP) and transition meetings.

### WHY NOW? WHY US?

The possibilities that result from engaging student voices are endless. They include:

- Students learn to be articulate and effective self-advocates (e.g., disclosure, services, accommodations, etc.).
- Students develop and broaden a sense of identity beyond their disability.
- Students expand an appreciation of what it means to be successful beyond adult constructs.
- Adults reconsider and adjust fixed mindsets and biases that prevent students from developing skills (e.g., inquiry, critique, revision) critical for success in school and in life

## WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

**STUDENTS CAN:** Approach their teachers and school leaders and convey their own interest in being more deeply involved in decisions that affect them.

**EDUCATORS AS LEADERS CAN:** Support student-led conferences by sharing promising practices such as service-learning, job shadowing, and other work-based learning opportunities, demonstrating modeling to other teachers and providing voice and choice for students with disabilities through their curricular and assessment decisions.

**SCHOOL LEADERS CAN:** Require special education faculty and others to mentor students in deepening their engagement with services and supports related to decision-making, and launch pilot programs to reshape pupil personnel services, including student-led IEP meetings.

**DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:** Develop criteria and provide relevant professional development that establishes consistency for each teacher in supporting student voice and choice across the district, including student presentations, modeled practices, and teacher training.

**POLICY MAKERS CAN:** Require student participation and encourage student-led IEP meetings as part of the district improvement plan.

# 21ST CENTURY LEARNING IN ACTION



## COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

Schools must provide students with disabilities a full range of opportunities to embody and embrace knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for success in school and in life. This can be accomplished by integrating 21st century learning into response to intervention (RTI) and multi-tier systems of supports (MTSS), creating small group instruction opportunities, and deeply engaging with students, their families, and educators.

### WHY NOW? WHY US?

Our schools have exceptionally high numbers of students with social and emotional needs that impact their success in school and their quality of life. Targeted interventions in school and access to supports (including reasonable accommodations) are ways to ensure that all students have the best chance to access grade-level curricula and flourish as members of the school and general communities. We are charged with providing the best learning experience for all children. An intervention strategy designed to address their needs makes it possible to meet this fundamental responsibility.

## WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

**STUDENTS CAN:** Become effective advocates for themselves and their peers, seeking support from educators, mentors, and other school personnel.

**EDUCATORS AS LEADERS CAN:** Integrate 21st century learning, RTI, and MTSS into classroom and schoolwide activities, collaborate with other stakeholders (e.g., parents, specialized support personnel), and assure needed flexibility when implementing programming.

**SCHOOL LEADERS CAN:** Support the implementation of 21st century learning and other programming that is informed by an ongoing measurement that gauges the effectiveness of interventions.

Support teachers by providing time to analyze and act on data, and make sure they have access to professional learning opportunities to enhance pedagogical skills based on measurement outcomes.

**DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:** Communicate with families and other stakeholders about the selection and implementation of interventions and supports.

Allocate funding for professional learning activities, flexibility in scheduling, and the hiring of needed staff and consultants.

**POLICY MAKERS CAN:** Allocate funding to implement comprehensive interventions and to provide technical assistance to engage students with disabilities in 21st century learning, in targeted and schoolwide improvement efforts

# 21ST CENTURY LEARNING IN ACTION



## POWERFUL, ENGAGING INSTRUCTION

Through curriculum selection and lesson design processes, schools must provide explicit instruction and intentional learning opportunities for all students. Co-designed and co-implemented by general and special educator personnel, learning inside the school should support the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential to 21st century success in the school community and beyond.

## WHY NOW? WHY US?

No two learners are the same. Teachers have to meet the needs of students who vary across a continuum of proficiency and knowledge. In addition to addressing these pedagogical challenges, educators must ensure that students can access curricula and are provided multiple pathways to demonstrate knowledge (e.g., through Universal Design for Learning, or UDL). Teachers need opportunities to deepen knowledge about instructional design and collaborate around implementation, measurement, and feedback. We need to ensure that all students' needs are being met and that teachers are collaborating to design instruction that engages all. When evidence-based instruction and needed supports are in place, students can integrate 21st century learning skills and dispositions in ways that prepare them for success in school and in life.

## WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

**STUDENTS CAN:** Engage in projects that help develop a deeper understanding of their disability (e.g., the specific nature of their challenges, the history of the disability rights movement, the impact of their disability with regard to their learning goals).

**EDUCATORS AS LEADERS CAN:** In addition to ensuring access to the general education curriculum, provide students with disabilities explicit instruction in self-determination, self-advocacy, and other key skills essential to their own progress and needed for successful collaboration with their peers.

**SCHOOL LEADERS CAN:** Protect time for general and special educators to collaborate before the school year (e.g., Curriculum & Instructional Design team).

Provide flexibility for dedicated common preparation periods throughout the school year.

**DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:** Partner with school leaders to create a calendar of professional development opportunities for general and special educator professionals that address best instructional practices for all students through the frame of UDL and 21st century learning.

**POLICY MAKERS CAN:** Ensure sufficient funding for schools to provide high-quality professional development and sustain opportunities for meaningful collaboration at the school and district level.

# 21ST CENTURY LEARNING IN ACTION



## HOLISTIC MEASUREMENT

To monitor student progress and measure overall success, schools and school districts need to be firmly committed to ensuring communication between special and general educators with regard to 21st century skills and dispositions. Measures of success should reflect progress in such areas as critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and communication, and self-advocacy skills and self-determination.

## WHY NOW? WHY US?

Each student with an identified disability has goals for which educators are legally required to collect data and monitor progress. Incorporating measures around 21st century goals in this process can ensure that ongoing changes in student outcomes are meaningful indicators of students' long-term success. The question is no longer whether measuring these outcomes will benefit students, but rather how to measure and use these data to inform instructional planning and support. This goal can be accomplished by investing in data collection systems that honor the full range of success measures and by facilitating dedicated time for educators to discuss and act on these data.

## WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

**STUDENTS CAN:** Self-monitor progress, leveraging a rubric or other resources provided by educators.

**EDUCATORS AS LEADERS CAN:** Collaborate with colleagues to aggregate and analyze data to identify individual, classwide, and subgroup trends that inform the development of 21st century skills..

**SCHOOL LEADERS CAN:** Provide time during the school day for general and special educators to meet regularly and discuss progress monitoring for students around 21st century skills.

Support staff-led professional development to build relationships among staff, expand staff belief in the need for 21st century competencies for all students, and implement a digital tracking system to facilitate measurement and data-based planning.

**DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:** Decrease staff caseloads (e.g., hire staff) and class size for both general and special educators.

Carve out funding for the development of the digital tracking system.

Provide early release days (i.e., students go home one hour early) to provide time for educator collaboration, ensuring that educators are available at the same time to discuss data.

**POLICY MAKERS CAN:** Establish regulations that address local priorities (e.g., decreased class size, smaller caseloads).

# 21ST CENTURY LEARNING IN ACTION



## EMPOWERING CULTURE

Our schools must be structured in ways that ensure all students feel welcome and experience educational equality. This can be achieved by integrating 21st century skills such as critical thinking, content mastery, communication, collaboration, self-directed learning, and academic mindset, and important skills and dispositions such as self-advocacy skills and self-determination into student's learning experiences.

## WHY NOW? WHY US?

Our students are expected to be successful in an extremely complex, rapidly changing, and competitive world. Unless we provide equity within our educational systems and remove barriers to deeper learning, students with disabilities will leave school without having lived the values of an inclusive society to which we all aspire.

## WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

**STUDENTS CAN:** Individually, collectively (with the support of other students), and with support from school faculty and other staff and advocates, contribute to decisions at the school and district level that impact K–12 learning and preparation for life in the community and in the workplace.

**EDUCATORS AS LEADERS CAN:** Implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies in classrooms.

Collaborate with colleagues across teaching teams to ensure that all students feel a part of and are engaged in 21st century learning opportunities.

**SCHOOL LEADERS CAN:** Establish a common vision of 21st century skills for all students including those with disabilities and amplify their voices in operationalizing that vision.

Embed and tailor professional development and build staff capacity from within the school system. Engage in hiring decisions that ensure that future employees are invested in 21st century practices. Celebrate the engagement and accomplishments of students with and without identified disabilities.

**DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:** Collaborate with school personnel to identify what kind of support is needed to create, nurture, and maintain an effective 21st century culture for students, faculty, and parents. Support the implementation of curriculum and empower schools to deepen a commitment to an inclusive culture in both curriculum decisions and structures.

Establish safeguards and safety nets in collaboration with school leaders and collaborate around establishing efficiency with schools to implement a vision of inclusive 21st century learning.

**POLICY MAKERS CAN:** Monitor existing legislative and regulatory language and propose changes that encourage the expansion of 21st century learning systems and activities across pre-K–12 school communities.