# Leadership for College and Career Readiness

*Dr. Richard Jones*
*Dr. Kathleen Weigel*

# Leadership for Career and College Readiness

Most schools today are necessarily focused on preparing students for three "big things" — achievement on state tests, earning a diploma, and readiness for college. When schools struggle with these three traditional but essential objectives, school leaders typically engage in various leadership practices to improve student performance. Leaders:

- attend to organization **dynamics** through staffing, defining roles and managing elements of the system.
- set a **direction** through standards, data measures, curriculum and instructional programs.
- pursue **diligence** in improving teaching and learning through sharing best teaching practices, professional learning, student support and increasing student engagement.

All of these conventional leadership practices have proven effective in addressing the "big three." Now, however, a growing number of taxpayers, business leaders, political leaders, and education thought-leaders are embracing an additional common objective: career readiness. They believe that 21st century learners — who will live and work in a world that is changing dramatically and largely unpredictably — need to be both career and college ready.

The Pathways to Prosperity Project, which is based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has produced a major report that examines the reasons for our failure to prepare so many young adults for their future and advances an exciting vision for how the United States can regain the leadership in educational attainment it held for over a century. Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century (Symonds, Schwartz, and Ferguson, 2011) contends that our national strategy for education and youth development has been too narrowly focused on college preparation through its academic, classroom-based approach.

Focusing exclusively on tests, diplomas, and college neglects many of the skills and knowledge that students need to be successful in life. Without a concurrent focus on life and career, the message to students is that "education is for education"

This paper is an excerpt from the publication, Leadership for Career and College Readiness, from the Successful Practices Network (SPN). The framework of leadership strategies described here defines the work of the Career Readiness Institute of the SPN, which is developing data tools, publications, and descriptions of best practices from exemplary schools that cultivate and support school leaders in this effort.

sake. When students perceive school as pointless or boring, their commitment to learning drops and so too does their achievement. Adding career readiness to the equation places emphasis on essential skills and knowledge and, more importantly, makes school more relevant and engaging.

# Defining Career Readiness

There is currently no consensus definition of career readiness. It will take further discussion among educators, employers, and parents to arrive at a common, consistent definition, but there are several aspects we are confident we know. For example, it will be difficult to determine career readiness in a typical assessment. Career readiness does involve academics, but it extends to the application of academic skills and knowledge connected to the real world. Career readiness also requires development of personal and interpersonal skills and work habits. It includes specific technical skills, but the depth and breadth of those skills is open for debate. Career readiness results from a combination of instructional programs, work-based learning, student activities, and counseling to develop a personalized education journey toward a career.

Career readiness has been a minor consideration in school improvement efforts, and many people think that as long as students master the "big three," they are ready for careers as well. On the contrary, career readiness cannot be assumed. To be career ready, students must have opportunities while in school to explore their interests and develop their talents beyond core academic skills. They need to deepen their learning through relevant projects that apply knowledge to real-world problems. They need to develop personal skills/work habits and attitudes, expand their knowledge of careers, and set personal goals beyond high school. Career readiness cannot be developed when schools focus only on tests, diplomas, and college. Developing career readiness must be intentional, not just incidental. Conventional leadership practices are necessary, but they are not sufficient when career readiness is added to college readiness as one of the student aspiration goals.

Traditional curriculum and instruction are heavily focused on academic courses driven toward college preparation, perhaps sprinkled with AP courses and a sampling of career and technical education (CTE), arts, and elective courses. Few students make choices among these options based on a goal or plan related to a career. Further, most academic courses fail to make connections between content and related careers. CTE offers great opportunities for students to develop work readiness, but these courses are typically offered late in students' secondary schooling and are perceived by many students and parents and most educators as lower in importance than academic courses. Some are also focused narrowly on preparation for a specific job, which may be premature and limiting for many teens. In any case, for a variety of reasons, most students never get to (or choose to) participate in CTE programs.

CTE best practices are one potential means to make all students career ready, but it is unrealistic that the entire education system can shift quickly to having every student complete a full and meaningful CTE program as a way to develop broad-based career readiness. And, although CTE may not be the right choice for every

*Conventional leadership practices are necessary, but they are not sufficient when career readiness is added to college readiness as one of the student aspiration goals.*

student, all students need to develop broad and enabling career awareness and personal career goals.

# K-12 Career Readiness

Schools need a K-12 focus on career readiness, something beyond holding an annual "career day" in junior high; an overworked school counselor taking time out from junior/senior college searches to administer an "interest inventory"; or offering career or technical courses only in the upper grades of high school. In addition, the development of college and career readiness requires the nurturing of common personal skills, study skills, and work habits, such as persistence, goal-setting, and interpersonal communications. Student assessment is mostly limited to core academic courses, and students often receive little objective feedback or coaching on their personal skills/work habits and attitudes, the so-called "life-ready skills" that every adult needs to acquire.

Career readiness is not necessarily a distinct and separate taxonomy, curriculum, or assessment, because many of the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that define career readiness overlap with and also define college readiness. More emphasis on college and career readiness requires that students acquire a broad range of skills and knowledge, only some of which are currently directly taught or intentionally assessed.

College and career readiness demands:

- that core academic instruction "stretches" students to apply their skills and knowledge to solve rigorous problems rather than simply recalling basic knowledge and facts.
- that students acquire career-specific competencies that enhance their opportunities to pursue a chosen career.
- that students have opportunities to demonstrate and improve the behaviors and attitudes essential to college and career readiness.

# Leadership Shifts

As a school objective, career and college readiness demands subtle — but important — shifts in leadership strategies in order to be achieved. Strong traditional leadership may help schools reach college readiness, but it is insufficient to promote and nurture career readiness as well. This gap is the leadership challenge for career and college readiness! Closing it will require ten shifts in traditional leadership thinking and practices.

*Dynamics - Shift from disjointed programs to a more integrated, collaborative, adaptive system*
1. *Energize the System:* Embrace and empower schools as unique, complex and open systems, constantly influenced by the environment
2. *Overwhelm Inertia:* Align school culture to truly reflect college and career
3. *Extend Your Reach:* Develop strategic community partnerships

3

*Direction - Shift from the comfort of status quo to accepting the challenge of ensuring all students pursue a successful path*

4. *Personalize — Don't Standardize:* Align with standards while also meeting individual student needs
5. *Aim for Rigor and Relevance:* Target instruction that addresses college and career readiness
6. *Measure What Matters:* Use multiple performance measures that reflect both college and career readiness

*Diligence - Shift from teachers "delivering" routine content to learning that focuses on student needs*

7. *Listen to Students:* Adopt practices that enhance student engagement
8. *Begin with the End in Mind:* Facilitate learning that moves students from where they are to where they need to be
9. *Revitalize Counseling Function:* Improve student career counseling and transition as a comprehensive core school function
10. *Reflect on BETTER Learning:* Stimulate teacher reflection on instruction yielding more student-centered, 21st Century learning
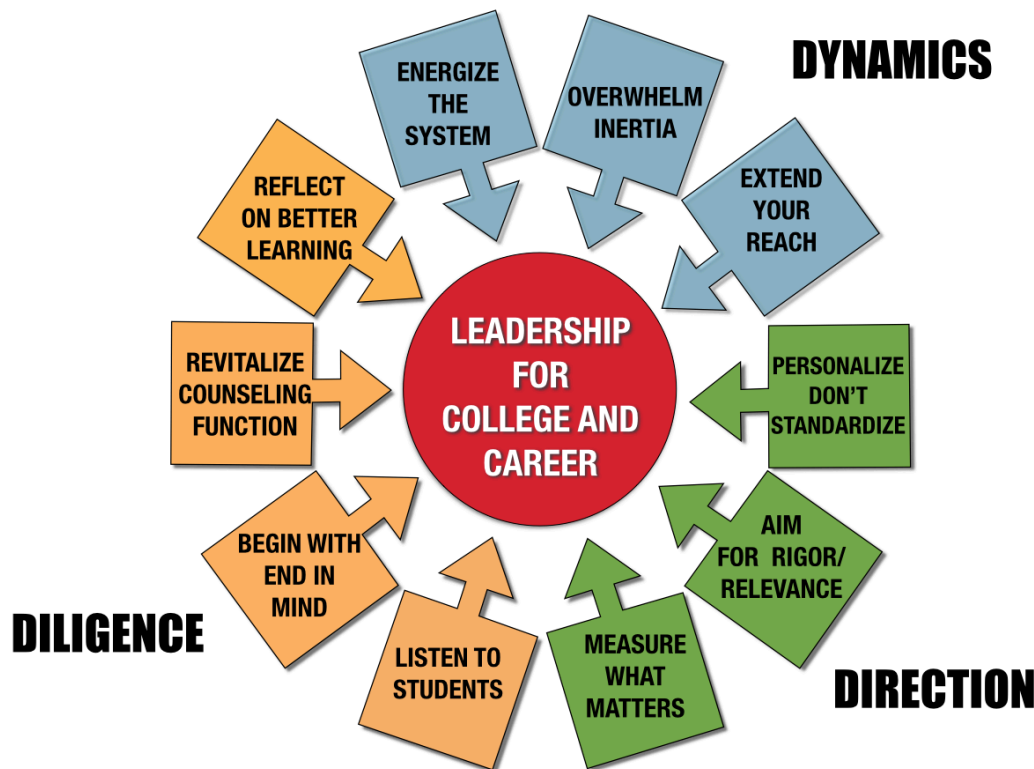
# Dynamics

Dynamics means addressing the organizational aspects of leadership. It includes three strategies:

- complex system thinking
- culture alignment
- strategic partnerships

Dynamics also requires following a mental model of leadership that recognizes the necessity of situational leadership actions, i.e., leadership based on the needs of the school at various times and under various conditions. Leadership strategies should adjust depending on the situation and as the organization evolves over time, while always striving to achieve its vision and adapting to environmental conditions. The Quadrant D Leadership Model (see Jones, Shannon, and Weigel, 2009) is a very useful mental model that allows leaders to reflect on their actions and the condition of the organization. This model defines leadership not just as a set of characteristics for an individual, but as the proactive actions, dispositions, and initiatives that administrators and staff take to improve the organization.

The leadership recommendations for complex system thinking, culture alignment, and strategic partnerships are based on the following assumptions.

- Leaders are not all-knowing and all-powerful.
- Mandates and policies establish minimum performance levels but do not inspire outstanding performance.
- Each person in a school (staff and students) responds uniquely to experiences based on his or her own values and beliefs.
- The knowledge to improve the system exists in individuals within the system, but it simply is not common knowledge.
- Sometimes — in fact, frequently — people act out of self-interest rather than in a manner to improve the greater school and student learning community.
- Without a driving purpose, schools maintain current practice.
- Culture trumps strategy. Strategic plans often dissolve when introduced into the existing entrenched, pervasive, and resistant school culture.
- Schools are constantly influenced by the social and demographic environment in which they are located.

The following descriptions introduce some of the specific context "mind-shifts" and changes in perspective that are necessary in school leadership actions to strengthen college and career readiness.
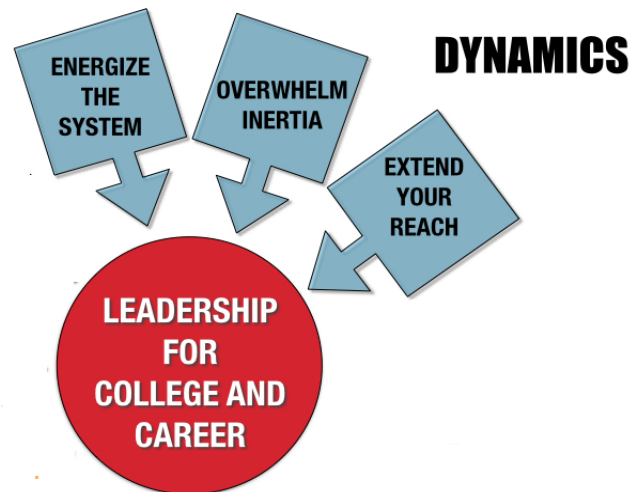
## 1. Energize the System: Embrace and empower schools as unique, complex and open systems, constantly influenced by the environment

Schools often seem chaotic, and chaos is often viewed as an absence of order. However, schools are complex systems that sometimes appear chaotic, but, within that chaos, learning occurs. Complex systems actually yield the results they are designed to produce, although long-term behavior can be difficult to predict with any accuracy.

Schools are also open systems, constantly influenced by the outside environment (Katz and Kahn, 1969). It's a mistake to take a systems approach to improving a school by considering it to be a closed process that follows consistent behaviors. Using conventional "quality-improvement" approaches from closed systems, such as manufacturing and information, often does not work. Such attempts to improve the system ignore emotion and focus on sterile goals, data, and standard processes. For example, asking teachers to follow an instructional script and fixed pacing guide will not yield consistent improvement in student achievement, because these strategies assume that the students in every classroom have the same learning needs and interests. This type of instructional practice reduces teaching to the delivering of content and disregards teachers' professional judgments on how best to their engage students and facilitate learning.

> Leaders must recognize the nuances of schools as complex systems...

Managing — and even changing — schools requires leaders to apply complex systems theory (Regine and Lewin, 2001). Leaders must recognize the nuances of schools as complex systems, built on many human interactions with all of the positive and negative impacts that come with being human. It is passion that attracts teachers to the profession and inspires them to great performance. Leading in a manner that attempts to ignore emotions does not fit with the nature of complex human systems.

Understanding that a system is complex does not mean that communication should be complex. Leaders must recognize that a school includes many diverse personalities and perspectives. When communication is full of jargon, people lose interest and never understand the message. Perhaps counterintuitively, in complex and diverse systems, communication actually needs to be simpler in order to inspire trust, commitment, and innovation within and across the organization.

The objective of school leadership should be to nurture a system that can constantly adapt to the environment and move toward its goal. When leaders attempt to control every aspect of the system, teaching is often reduced to a minimalist and robotic approach, overlooking great learning opportunities that particularly reflect career readiness preparation.

| Complex Systems Thinking | |
|---|---|
| **Current** | **to**     **College and Career Readiness** |
| Cling to past practice that has been successful. | Adapt and innovate to meet changing expectations and needs of students for college and career. |
| Remove emotion from actions and behaviors. | Evoke emotions in visioning students' future career plans. |
| Strive for conformity. | Embrace diversity and variability in staff and curriculum with more real-world experiences. |
| Give messages to staff and stakeholders that are detailed, complex, and use unique language and jargon. | Simplify messages through models and stories. |
| Allow secondary teachers to work in separate subjects and departments. | Foster greater connections and collaboration between subjects and departments. |
| Staff focus primarily on "doing their job" and blaming others for any dysfunction in the system. | Communicate a vision of college and career readiness and support teachers in incorporating a balanced focus in interactions with students. |
| Apply changes evenly across the whole system. | Nurture small experiments that enhance college and career readiness. |

### 2. *Overwhelm Inertia:* Align School Culture to Truly Reflect College and Career Readiness

> *Leadership strategies must align the school culture to the stated goals.*

Schools have strong traditions and cultures that contribute to maintaining the status quo and make them reliable and highly institutionalized. Particularly in schools that are perceived to be "pretty good," risk-taking and innovation are often discouraged ("If it ain't broke, don't fix it."). The organization of schools by grades and the cycle of the nine-month school year perpetuate the practice of automatically promoting students to the next level. High expectations are defined as college acceptance — the "brass ring" of student success. Consequently, courses defined as "college prep" carry more prestige in the school culture. Other courses are merely electives that take time and interest away from the primary goal of preparing students for college. Embracing both college and career readiness requires a significant culture shift in most schools, not simply adding a new course, a new test, or a change in diploma requirements. The "college is everything" mindset is culture that will prevent changes to more broadly-based student readiness. Leadership strategies must align the school culture to the stated goals.

| Culture Alignment | |
|---|---|
| **Current** | **to**     **College and Career Readiness** |
| Rely on strategic plans and formulaic solutions to make improvements. | Motivate staff toward a common vision and encourage "bottom-up" innovation through peer leadership. |
| Avoid making mistakes and punish failure. | Encourage risk-taking and learn from mistakes. |

| Culture Alignment | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Current** | **to** | **College and Career Readiness** |
| Keep the building, artifacts, and workgroups the same while expecting change. | | Be willing to change artifacts, room assignments, and teams to effect change. |
| Define students as the objects of learning and not as participants in the process. | | Develop and engage students as participants in the learning process. |
| Allow conversations among teachers to pursue their interests and exclusively define success as a diploma or college entrance. | | Lead and direct teacher conversations to focus on career readiness as well as college readiness. |
| Keep all staff currently employed with minimal movement. | | Be willing to move and reassign staff to reflect greater emphasis on career readiness. |

### 3. *Extend Your Reach:* Develop Strategic Community Partnerships

An emphasis on college and career is an opportunity to expand student learning by making multiple connections to the community. Instruction becomes more relevant and engaging when it includes local problems or when students are "making a difference" by applying their skills in the community. Teachers are often handicapped in introducing relevant learning contexts and "authentic" problems and projects because their own work or experience outside of school is limited. Working in partnership with teachers, business and community leaders can provide both technical expertise and external perspectives that will enrich learning and readiness for life beyond the classroom. An important way to enhance the career readiness component of schools and student learning is through strong strategic partnerships with individuals and organizations in the community.

| Strategic Partnerships | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Current** | **to** | **College and Career Readiness** |
| Limit partnerships to donations of resources. | | Ensure partnerships benefit schools and partners. |
| Deny engagement of students in sites outside of school. | | Encourage engagement of students in sites outside of school for work-based and service learning. |
| Allow fragmented partnerships. | | Take a systems approach to partnerships with common goals and roles. |
| Limit community adults in the school. | | Engage community adults in the school. |
| Anticipate that partner relationships will not change curriculum. | | Expect curriculum to be influenced by real-world input from the community. |
| View community-based learning as an "alternative" for a few students only. | | Strive for all students to be involved in community-based learning (live and web-enable). |
| Provide limited work-based learning opportunities. | | Provide diverse forms of work-based learning opportunities and encourage extensive student participation. |

# Direction

To achieve college and career readiness, there are three key direction strategies for instructional leadership:

- standards alignment
- targeted instruction
- student performance measures

## 4. *Personalize Don't Standardize:* Align with Standards While Also Meeting Individual Students Needs

Education standards define measures of commonly shared, consistent student achievement. However, standards should not define a standardized curriculum in which all students, with their diverse abilities and interests, are expected to achieve at the same speed, in the same learning style, and through the same context and experiences. Schools need to create multiple learning experiences that can be personalized to each student's unique needs. Secondary schools need to provide multiple pathways to a diploma which reflect a diversity of career and postsecondary learning options. This becomes even more critical as schools aspire to develop the personal and technical skills students required to be both college and career ready.

| Standards Alignment | |
|---|---|
| **Current** to | **College and Career Readiness** |
| Mandate uniform curriculum and learning experiences. | Include student choice in curriculum and learning experiences. |
| Use standards to define small bits of curriculum to be taught separately. | Integrate multiple standards in rich interdisciplinary curriculum. |
| Expect teachers to follow a curriculum and pacing guide based on standards. | Empower teachers to make adjustments in curriculum to better meet student needs. |
| Lock students into time-based instruction. | Allow students to move at a pace consistent with their development. |
| Define learning in discrete, specific skills that add up to a total student. | Define learning from the "whole" student down to specific skills he or she needs to learn. |
| Cover as many topics as possible in case they might be needed. | Help students learn deeply the priority skills they need to be continual learners. |

## 5. *Aim for Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships:* Target Instruction that Addresses College and Career Readiness

School leaders are accustomed to solving "technical" problems and challenges that first require analysis and then taking decisive action to solve them. Improving instruction is a leadership challenge that is an "adaptive" problem as opposed to

a "technical" problem — it requires multiple adaptive actions over time. In order to yield persistent instructional improvement. Adaptive problems require leaders to take precise aim at a target. A clear target allows each staff member to align his or her individual teaching across the organization. The target of instructional leadership, then, is a clear and specific focus for all instruction that leaders support in curriculum development, look for in walk-throughs and evaluations, and provide support for via ongoing professional learning and collaboration. Translating high expectations into daily teacher attitudes, behaviors, and instructional practices is difficult. However, one powerful way teachers can exhibit high expectations in their teaching is by embracing a vision of rigor and relevance.

The notion of greater rigor and relevance has broad-based public support as a means to — and desirable goal of — student learning. Within the Rigor/Relevance Framework® <http://www.leadered.com/rrr.html>, Quadrant D defines the type of learning that equates to college and career readiness — students are able to think at high cognitive levels and also able to apply their learning in real-world applications with unpredictable outcomes, i.e., no single or "pat" solution. The Rigor/Relevance Framework is a simple but powerful and reliable mental model, and Quadrant D learning is the level of skills and knowledge needed for college and career readiness.

*One powerful way teachers can exhibit high expectations is by embracing a vision of rigor and relevance.*

The notion of relationships fits into this target, too, because achieving the goal of high rigor and high relevance is made possible by first building strong, positive, trusting, and personalized relationships with students.

| Targeted Instruction | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Current** | **to** | **College and Career Readiness** |
| Stress student test scores as the goal. | | Stress learning as the goal, with test scores as one element of measuring progress. |
| Focus on "schooling" moving students through the system. | | Focus on learning, not where, when, or how fast students learn. |
| Perpetuate teaching strategies at low learning levels, e.g., recall of facts. | | Promote teaching strategies where student present thoughtful ideas and solutions. |
| Continue a style of teaching where students are told what information to remember. | | Encourage and facilitate students' active construction of meaning. |
| Be content with teacher-center classrooms with passive student learning. | | Encourage student-centered classrooms with active student learning. |
| Allow separate subjects to follow unique content-based teaching strategies. | | Use a common set of teaching strategies that apply across subjects, all striving for rigor and relevance. |
| Encourage standardized teaching practices for everyone to follow. | | Encourage teachers to create performance tasks to promote rigorous and relevant learning. |

6. *Measure What Matters:* **Use Multiple Performance Measures that Reflect Both College and Career Readiness**

Over the past several years, conversations about school improvement have stressed data-driven instruction. This is a positive step toward more analytical,

evidence-based, and objective decision making by measuring the results of teaching practices. Unfortunately, the effort has been reduced to data-driven test rehearsal, where "teaching" becomes test preparation and students practice those questions they have answered incorrectly in practice tests. This misplacement of effort fails on three levels. First, data is often based on limited measures. Secondly, a written recall test becomes the primary definition of success. Finally, these tests fail to guide teachers to change actual instruction. The shift to college and career readiness requires multiple data measures to better triangulate students' actual achievement. This includes more extensive use of performance assessment, in which students show application of skills and knowledge. Moreover, assessment data needs to be more timely, actionable, and practical that will allow teachers to improve their teaching.

> *… data needs to be timely, actionable and practical...*

| Student Performance Measures | |
|---|---|
| **Current** to | **College and Career Readiness** |
| Use a few standardized measures. | Use many individualized measures. |
| Be content that teachers have limited knowledge of how data is derived. | Ensure teachers have extensive knowledge of how data is derived. |
| Employ measures that ascertain **what** students have learned and **who** has learned. | Employ measures that also ascertain **how** students are learning. |
| Collect data **about** students. | Collect data **from** students. |
| Use measures based on minimum performance. | Use data measures for stretch learning and engagement. |
| Limit performance levels to internal school aspects. | Expand performance levels to include external aspects. |

# Diligence

Leadership for college and career readiness requires diligence to continue efforts to improve school learning practices. Learning in some schools is currently undergoing a radical transformation. Traditional learning process involves the planning and delivery of teacher-directed experiences; however, changes in students and technology as well as changes in expectations, are placing greater emphasis on the design of engaging learning experiences rather than on teacher-centered delivery of such experiences.
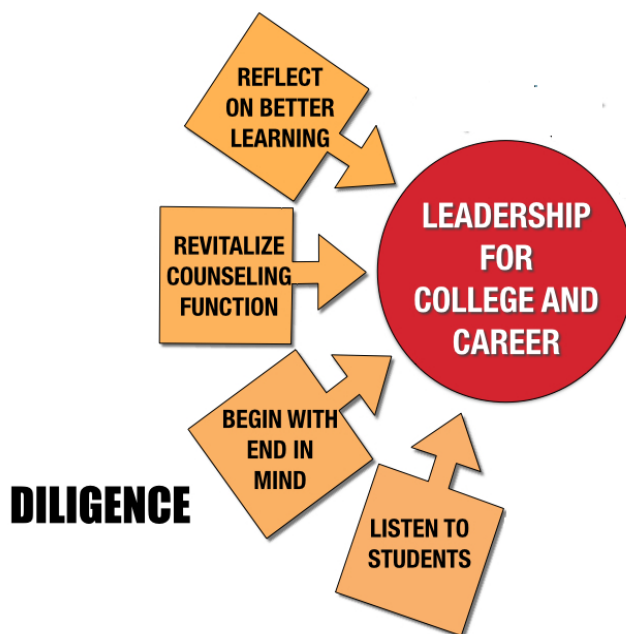
Learning leadership strategies for college and career readiness attempt to influence school practices directly in four areas:

- student engagement,
- instructional planning,
- career and transitional counseling and
- instructional practice.

The first strategy is student engagement — creating an environment in which students are physically present, mentally challenged, and emotionally connected to instruction. Instruction that contributes to college and career readiness is not passive learning. It requires high levels of student ownership, responsibility, and engagement. The second strategy involves a "backwards design" to planning instruction. College and career readiness instruction must be personalized to meet individual student needs and culminate with a product or presentation by the student. Achieving readiness for every student requires support and transition services to ensure that each student takes full advantage of various appropriate learning experiences matched to his or her needs and interests.The final strategy relates to professional learning related to instructional practices, which must be continuous and personalized to meet individual teacher needs.

## 7. *Listen to Students:* Adopt Practices that Enhance Student Engagement

Creating schools that promote college and career readiness is not about teachers working harder. It is about teachers working smarter to get students to work harder. It does not mean pumping students with loads of knowledge; it means inspiring them to be motivated, self-directed, and independent learners. Schools need to shift from simply being comfortable with students who are well-behaved and compliant to expecting students to be excited and passionate about learning — and designing learning experiences intentionally to accomplish this preferred state. This may sound hard to do with the challenges of today's student culture and their many outside attractions and distractions other than school, but we only need to listen to students and they will reveal their interests and values, which staff can use to engage them. Listening can and should include personal conversations and structured feedback through surveys, such as WE™ Survey Suite <http://www.wesurveys.org>, to identify and quantify student perceptions.

> *Schools need to shift from being comfortable with students who are simply well-behaved and compliant…*

| Student Engagement | |
|---|---|
| **Current**      to | **College and Career Readiness** |
| Begin with knowing policies and regulations. | Begin with knowing your students. |
| Focus only on behavioral engagement. | Focus on emotional and cognitive engagement as well as behavioral |
| Focus on student compliance. | Focus on student empowerment. |
| Drive students with "carrots and sticks" rewards and punishments. | Drive students with purpose, mastery, and autonomy. |
| Use one-size-fits-all practices. | Use personalized practices. |
| Assume you know how students feel. | Survey students to collect their perceptions of school. |

### 8. *Begin with the End in Mind:* Facilitate Learning that Moves Students from Where They Are to Where They Need to Be

Great teaching begins with good planning and a "backwards design" approach, which is an excellent planning practice to help ensure that teachers are adjusting instruction to meet the needs of students. Lessons should not be planned in a vacuum; a good plan takes into consideration a specific group of students and how to connect them to the new concepts or knowledge to be learned. Having a well-defined "end" of a lesson in mind helps a teacher facilitate instruction to ensure students reach the performance goal. When students fall behind, the teacher can make adjustments and re-teach as necessary. The backwards design approach also helps to ensure judicious use of formative and summative assessment practices. In contrast, when teachers begin planning with the content they want to cover, instruction can become a boring treadmill of teacher presentation and "parroted" student drill and practice. Great teaching begins with the end in mind!

| Instructional Planning | |
|---|---|
| **Current**          to | **College and Career Readiness** |
| Use an instructional model that perpetuates content-based teaching in separate subjects. | Use an instructional model that emphasizes the overlap of essential skills and knowledge in interdisciplinary learning. |
| Design a summative assessment of student learning that emphasizes recall of knowledge. | Design a summative assessment that evaluates a performance where students demonstrate application of knowledge. |
| Load up instruction on content knowledge in case students might need it. | Provide instruction on content knowledge that students require for performance of the final task. |
| Plan and deliver lessons without any knowledge of student characteristics. | Plan and adjust instruction based on knowledge of students' prior learning and abilities. |
| Move all students through instruction at the same pace. | Personalize learning and re-teaching based on feedback and formative assessments. |
| Base reading comprehension level on the textbook and recommended literature. | Base reading comprehension level on reading required for college and careers. |
| Require students who fail to meet proficiency in the allotted time to repeat the course or grade. | Provide interventions on a timely basis to reduce failures and repeats. |

### 9. *Revitalize Counseling Function:* Improve Student Career Counseling and Transition as a Comprehensive Core School Function

Student career planning should be a continuous process as students move through K-12 education. In many schools, there are some, often separate, experiences introducing students to current career information and assisting them in analyzing their interests and exploring career options. A national survey of young adults (ages 18 to 24) to gauge their perspectives on education today revealed that 57 percent of students report their high schools as fair, poor, or very poor at helping students choose or be prepared for future careers (Associated Press. 2011). Less

than a quarter of students credit their guidance counselor for helping them with these issues.

Even in schools that require a written career plan, the practice often becomes a routine paper exercise. Achieving college and career readiness requires students to develop and continue to revise a dynamic career plan. There is no doubt that funding cuts have reduced capacity for counseling in schools, but leaders cannot let this function diminish in times of tight budgets. Through instruction and counseling, students should have the opportunity to reflect on interests and acquire career information. This will require unique professional development for teachers, since many lack personal career experience outside of education.

Counseling support is also essential for academic skill development. Too often academic intervention only occurs after a student fails. Schools have created a number of academic support options in schools, but too often the entire school staff is not familiar with these options and students are not proactively counseled into appropriate solutions to assist their academic development. Further academic support can also be provided in relevant career related technical projects rather than general remedial programs. Too frequently, relevant project-based learning is stereotyped for non-college-bound students.

> *Less than a quarter of students credit their guidance counselor for helping them…*

Finally, in the transitions from school, whether a student earns a diploma or decides to leave as dropout, schools have a responsibility to provide transition support. This is mandated for students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), but it needs to be provided for all students in a comprehensive system.

The leadership responsibility in schools is to move a diverse set of fragmented services into a comprehensive systematic approach that is tied to instruction. Counselors, teachers and others are all part of the solution. Counselors with expertise in career counseling need to take a leadership role in revitalizing counseling as a system wide function.  Teachers need to understand the services available and how to connect students to those services when needs arise. Achieving college and career readiness not only comes from great learning experiences, but also from adults  counseling students to improve their decision-making and connecting their education experiences to their future interests, tentative plans and goals.

| Career and Transition Counseling | |
|---|---|
| **Current**                                to | **College and Career Readiness** |
| Allow counseling limited to college application w/o consideration of career | Ensure college planning integral part of career plan |
| Conduct isolated career planning events | Provide ongoing career planning, integrated with instruction |
| Make career planning exclusive responsibility of school counselors | Direct school counselors take lead role with teachers in providing career information and developing career plans. |

| Career and Transition Counseling | |
|---|---|
| **Current**           **to** | **College and Career Readiness** |
| Neglect support activities to prepare students to transition to college or career from school. | Make transition support for all students, regardless of career path or education plans |
| Limit transition support to mandated special education students | Assist all students in transition support and making transition plans. |
| Activate student academic support only after a student fails | Be proactive in student academic support and assist students as needs arise |
| Limit academic intervention to generic instruction. | Provide intervention in relevant context integrated with technical projects. |

**10.** *Reflect on BETTER Learning:* **Stimulate Teacher Reflection on Instruction Yielding More Student-centered, 21st Century Learning**

Conversations about college and career readiness emphasizes students learning be creative, collaborative, and be critical independent thinkers with positive work habits. Achieving these 21st century skills is more about instruction than curriculum. Teachers need to design instructional experiences that encourage and reward these skills.

Effective teachers continue to improve their practice by reflecting on what works and what can be improved in their teaching. One of the ways to stimulate reflection is to use a survey that highlights gaps between current and preferred state.

One of the initiatives of the Career Readiness Institute (CRI) under the leadership of Successful Practices Network introduces a new form of data-driven instruction that can trigger teacher self reflection, inspire great teaching and lead to continuous improvement. This initiative is a series of teacher reflection surveys based on the BETTER Learning Model. BETTER is an acronym for six instructional elements that are essential 21st Century skills and reflects cumulative effective teaching research.

- **B**uild Connections with Relevance
- **E**ngage as Independent Learners
- **T**est for Proficiency
- **T**arget Personal Skills and Work Habits
- **E**mpower with Hope and Confidence
- **R**eward Creativity and Innovation

This BETTER model and the surveys give teachers a tool that can inspire outstanding instruction and move beyond the minimum effective focus in teacher evaluation. Discover more about the surveys and the BETTER Learning Model, at the CRI web site. <http://cri.spnetwork.org>

| Instructional Practice | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Current** | **to** | **College and Career Readiness** |
| Build lessons around learning large chunks of content knowledge with no context | | Build connections for students with relevance their experience and the real world |
| Insist on follow pacing guide to cover the curriculum and all students learning at same speed and doing same work | | Engage students as independent learners. |
| Objectively grade students on average number of questions correct | | Test students on proficiency |
| Give students only independent work and reduce grades for poor behavior | | Target development of personal skills, positive work habits and collaboration |
| Narrow student thinking as passive accumulators of knowledge | | Empower students with hope and confidence |
| Restrict lessons to recall of facts learned through rote memorization | | Reward creativity and innovation |

# Summary

College and career readiness must become a new and different goal of 21st century learning and achievement for students. However, ensuring that students become both college and career ready will require effective and different leadership, including a number of transformational leadership attitudes, skills, and strategies. This paper has described the elements of that kind of emerging and essential next-generation leadership, as observed in dozens of model schools across the country that are focused on college and career readiness. The solutions to career and college readiness for students lie within the leadership talent and forward-thinking vision that already exists within our education system. It remains only for leaders to discover and elevate these career-readiness practices to the status of common practices.

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for further information, contact
Successful Practices Network
518 723-2063
info@spnet.us