

Deeper Learning Language Insights and Ideas

TO: Neha Gohil, Hewlett Foundation
FROM: Hattaway Communications
DATE: June 20, 2018
RE: Feedback on Deeper Learning Language from Grantees, Teachers and Civil Rights Leaders

This memo synthesizes the feedback we received from grantees and teachers about language relating to deeper learning and the competencies, as well as insights from conversations with civil rights and social justice leaders. It also offers recommendations for communicating about Hewlett's education work moving forward. This memo is divided into three parts:

1. Overall insights and takeaways for communicating about your work
2. Specific feedback from grantees and teachers about about deeper learning messages
3. Specific feedback from grantees and teachers about about competency messages

Part 1: Overall Insights and Takeaways

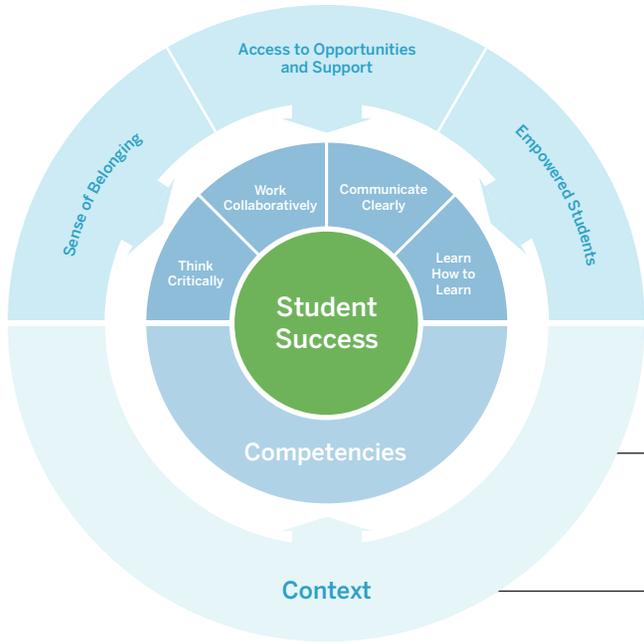
Present a more expansive framework for student success that reflects the importance of school culture, student empowerment and personalized support, in addition to the revised competencies.

Teachers, grantees and civil rights leaders familiar with Hewlett’s deeper learning work recognize that the six competencies reflect their goals for what students should know and be able to do. However, they also note that some of the competencies—such as build an academic mindset and master academic content—do not fit into the same single category.

Below, we visualize a new framework that incorporates and builds on a revised set of four competencies, reflects your focus on and commitment to equity, and centers student success as the goal of your work. Broadly, the components of the framework are context, competencies and student success. Master Content Knowledge and Building an Academic Mindset do not appear in those words in the visualization, based on feedback we received from teachers, grantees and civil rights and social justice leaders. We have provided some additional explanation for each.

We have offered two options for this new visualization: one illustrates both the broad components of the framework along with its specific aspects; and one shows how context, competencies and student success fit together, then separately offering the specific aspects in more detail. We feel these two options could serve different purposes in different contexts, when you may require more or less detail to communicate a point. We welcome your thoughts on both.

OPTION 1



Student Success

Student success is at the center of the Foundation’s work, with equitable outcomes as your goal. Several relevant themes reoccurred throughout our research with teachers, grantees, and civil rights and social justice leaders, including the empowerment of students to define success in ways that are authentic and relevant to them and their communities, the development of self-advocacy skills, and the ability to take control of their education. As defined in this framework, student success means all students have the power to achieve self-set goals. We believe all students can succeed in this way once the right context is in place and once students have had the chance to develop the four competencies.

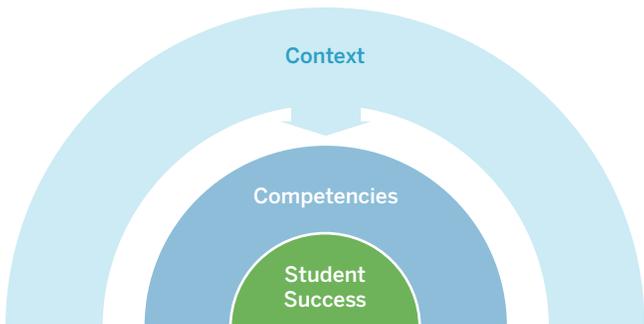
Competencies

Thinking critically, communicating clearly, working collaboratively, and learning how to learn are the foundational skills that enable students to succeed academically, socially and professionally. Students must learn and exhibit these skills through productive engagement with academic subject matter, but also by navigating the complexities of school, work and life on their way to graduation. Students must also learn and develop “good student” study skills, including effective note taking, staying alert and engaged in class, making use of teacher office hours, and developing disciplined work habits.

Context

This section represents the larger context within which students are developing the competencies and defining success. It includes, but isn’t limited to, an environment that puts students first and helps them feel a sense of belonging, provides access to opportunities and the support to take full advantage of those opportunities, and empowers students to engage authentically and meaningfully in their own learning. empowered students who can define success in their own authentic ways, take charge of their own educational experience and feel that education represents an opportunity to achieve personal goals; and equitable access to opportunities, as well as the support necessary to take advantage of those opportunities. These components are all prerequisites for an engaging and valuable K-12 experience.

OPTION 2



Master Content Knowledge

Because none of the audiences worried that deeper learning practices would replace classroom subjects or the need for teachers and students to develop content expertise, explicitly highlighting mastering content knowledge felt redundant to some respondents. Including mastering content knowledge as a separate competency also confused some respondents, who felt that students were being expected to become experts in each subject area. Instead, respondents feel that content knowledge and subject matter are the materials with which students engage in the classroom, and cut across all of the other competencies as the primary setting in which students learn and develop skills.

We believe audiences will understand that your approach to fostering student success relies on strong, up-to-date academic content, and that you don't need to include this competency explicitly.

Build an Academic Mindset

Many respondents were confused by what academic mindset meant in this context, often mistaking it for growth mindset or arguing that its definition did not reflect the educational field's definition of mindset. Moreover, many audiences noted that a student's sense of belonging to a school is not an acquirable skill like the other competencies, such as thinking critical thinking or collaboration. We believe that the Academic Mindset core ideas are better communicated in the framework's larger context layer, which describes aspirational goals and expectations for both empowered students and a school culture that fosters a welcoming and inclusive environment.

RECOMMENDATION

Present an expansive framework that centers student success, includes the competencies, and illustrates the importance of the conditions that enable students to succeed. Your communications do not need to include every component of the framework but should lead with and highlight student success—students empowered to achieve the goals they set for themselves—as the focus of your work. The framework should acknowledge and visualize that students cannot succeed on their own, particularly those furthest from opportunity. Instead schools, teachers, parents and communities all play a role in creating the necessary conditions for students to derive value from their educational experience and to succeed after graduation.

Articulating the principles of student success will help to center equity in your approach and create a more inclusive environment for educators, organizations and other funders to join your efforts.

Teachers, grantees and civil rights leaders generally support all of the ideas and goals that deeper learning encompasses and gave positive feedback in response to the language we tested. For example, grantees regularly rated deeper learning vision and competency messages as a 7 or 8 out of 10, with 10 as the most positive.

That said, many people, including teachers in particular, are confused by what the term deeper learning actually refers to, and some civil rights leaders feel it distracts from productive support for organizations working to advance equity. Your communications should instead describe your vision for student success that centers student, parent and community goals, and that emphasizes equity and support for those furthest from opportunity. Your communications should also describe your approach to achieving those goals.

Many civil rights and social justice leaders feel philanthropic foundations invest too many resources in developing overly niche programmatic areas of focus, rather than investing broadly to support student success. Instead, these leaders want to see more cross funder collaboration to tackle large systemic issues and more humility from foundations in supporting existing work.

Lastly, teachers feel that current messages do not distinguish deeper learning from other educational initiatives or movements, though they support the overall deeper learning sentiments and goals. Many struggle to connect the competencies to the overall message or what changes deeper learning requires in their classrooms. Though the goal for the first phase of message development was to create a broad, supportable message for all educators and advocates, this subsequent confusion among audiences is still concerning.

“If we focus on scaling outcomes instead of models—it might be hundreds of ideas that get us to the place where larger numbers of young people are successful. We won’t do it by identifying two things that we can scale.”

–Civil rights leader

“What makes deeper learning unique and not another educational trend? The descriptions sound like other ideas (CCSS and 21st Century Learning skills) cobbled together and given a new name: deeper learning.” –Teacher

“[Current deeper learning messaging] leads one to believe deeper learning is a set of practices. We use deeper learning as the north star, the descriptors of the learning we want to achieve, the what of the learning. This is distinct from the how of learning.” –Grantee

RECOMMENDATION

Communicate how your work advances equity and student success to focus on your actions and values.

This approach will help educators, organizations and other funders readily understand how their work aligns with yours, keeping the focus on the Foundation’s ultimate goal for students. It will also enable increased flexibility in your approach to grantmaking. Because any branded term can potentially create barriers to usage in the classroom, and since different people and groups continue to define and use deeper learning in different (and sometimes incorrect) ways, we suggest that you avoid emphasizing the term deeper learning and focus instead on student success. Instead, communications should clearly articulate Hewlett’s values and its vision for advancing student success and equity in K-12 education, focusing on the competencies as a framework for achieving those goals.

Student success—defined as students having the agency to set and achieve their own goals—should be the focus of the communications about your work.

When defining student success, teachers, grantees, and civil rights and social justice leaders all emphasize the importance of students feeling a sense of agency and control over their lives and futures, rather than simply performing to testing and assignment standards. They see the ideal role of K-12 education as providing students with the knowledge, skills and mindsets to become advocates for themselves and their communities.

Additionally, civil rights leaders advocate for students to pursue relevant, authentic learning that allows them to draw on their own cultural backgrounds, explore their own interests, and discover their passions. Valuing students' backgrounds and unique experiences helps build a sense of identity and belonging, engages parents and communities in students' education, and ultimately ensures that students can be successful in whatever way is most relevant and important to them.

“I really feel the role of public education is to make you feel like you are in control of the story of your life. I’m driving the narrative of my life and not anybody else.” **–Civil rights leader**

“This set of competencies are best characterized as a toolbox where students are taught various skill sets that can help them become their own advocate and independent learners through what they have learned in the classroom and applied to their lives outside of school.” **–Teacher**

“Overall, these competencies give students a framework to self-monitor their academic progress and become in control of their lives and be proud of what they are learning and doing at school.” **–Teacher**

“Of course academic success is important, but the idea of agency is also so important.” **–Civil rights leader**

“We’re not allowing students to take advantage of the cultural knowledge, critically thinking about what’s around them.” **–Civil rights leader**

RECOMMENDATION

Communications should articulate a clear vision and goal that centers student success as defined by the student and their communities, and that emphasizes student empowerment as a primary goal for K-12 education.

All messages should reflect an explicit commitment to equity of access, opportunity, support and outcome for all students.

While the deeper learning message and some of the language used to describe the competencies mention the need for equal opportunities and support, teachers and grantees think student equity should be more central. In particular, communications should explain how Hewlett's education work benefits the students least served by the educational system and advances equity, civil rights and social justice.

Civil rights and social justice leaders, grantees and teachers all define equity as not only access to opportunities but also the support necessary to take full advantage of those opportunities. And they believe empowering students as advocates for their own learning ensures they have the skills to define and achieve their own vision of success. Taken together, student access to opportunities within a supportive and empowering school culture ensures the equity of outcome that reflects student and community values and goals.

"We need to provide enough varied and rich opportunities to get to that place where [students will] have the tools to get to the level they want to." –Civil rights leader

"Kids need the tools to engage successfully and inclusively in a diverse and democratic society."
–Civil rights leader

"I would summarize these competencies as providing students with an inclusive, individualized learning environment that is academically engaging, both for neurotypical students and those on the autism spectrum."
–Teacher

RECOMMENDATION

Demonstrate a commitment to equity through your goals for students and an articulation of the competencies, but don't rely simply on the word equity. Show how your work facilitates access to educational opportunities for students furthest from opportunity, provides the support necessary for the students to take advantage of those opportunities, and allows them to build the skills necessary to achieve success as they choose to define it.

Ensure that communications about your work reflect and describe the broader K-12 experience.

Grantees and teachers want to ensure that messages about deeper learning practices and outcomes reflect the experiences of children and young adults outside of traditional K-12 settings, as well as students across all grade levels and students with learning and other disabilities. Current deeper learning language tends to reflect a traditional high school experience where students learn exclusively in a classroom setting and graduate on a stage with their peers. Additionally, current language sometimes emphasizes higher-order skills such as statistical analysis; this is not always accessible to teachers and grantees working with students in lower grades.

“Many of our target students are nontraditional ... overage/undercredited, taking courses in community college, online, etc. The emphasis on a stage and high school paints a more traditional and staid picture than [what] we are about or want to be conveying as we reinvent education for the future for our most marginalized students.”

–Grantee

“I wonder why this message elevates data analysis, statistical and scientific reasoning over creativity with the use of the phrase “as well.” Perhaps it could be: ‘Lessons expose students a variety of tools for creative problem solving including data analysis, statistical reasoning, scientific reasoning, nonlinear thinking and persistence.’”

–Grantee

RECOMMENDATION

Ensure that your communications are inclusive of different audiences and reflect their unique experiences. For instance, don't just provide examples of competency development in the classroom, but also include what it looks like in nontraditional settings or for different ages and types of students.

Explain how your work is responsive to community needs, includes diverse voices, and supports education in and out of the classroom.

Civil rights and social justice leaders in particular emphasize that philanthropic support is generally least effective when funders do not work to understand the needs of the communities, educators and workers on the ground. These respondents also want to see funders like the Hewlett Foundation make a sustained and earnest effort to listen to communities furthest from opportunity, to involve them in decision-making processes, and to remain in dialogue and accountable over time.

Civil rights and social justice leaders also want the Foundation to acknowledge that education does not just happen inside the classroom, and to support efforts to sustain learning in extracurricular and community contexts. Additionally, these respondents continue to emphasize the degree to which factors outside of school—such as hunger and housing insecurity—impact students' ability to learn and engage in the classroom. They want to see the Foundation partner with, if not directly support, other funders and organizations that fight against these challenges.

“We need interrelationships between sectors to come up with real reform that’s informed and evidence based and meets the needs of communities.” –**Civil rights leader**

“Be ready to adapt your models so it meets the community or your teacher’s needs. And be open to be making those changes. Often times if you’re doing racial work, it’s not just black or Hispanic, so many folks are being left out of the [conversation].” –**Civil rights leader**

“Access to affordable housing, wages, those are all education issues. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.”
–**Civil rights leader**

RECOMMENDATION

Clearly articulate how your approach to funding organizations and initiatives reflects and is responsive to identified community needs, including voices from marginalized communities and from people working on the ground. Describe how you ensure accountability to the communities the Foundation seeks to serve.

Where possible, acknowledge that education happens both in and out of the classroom, and demonstrate that you understand the complex issues that intersect with and impact educational outcomes.

Part 2: Deeper Learning Language

Deeper Learning Vision

Current Language

Every student in America should walk across the stage at their high school graduation as a confident, life-long learner, equipped with the knowledge, skills and mindset they need to be successful and lead a productive, fulfilling life.

- Some grantees want to be more explicit about equity by emphasizing underserved and disenfranchised students.
- Grantees feel this image normalizes a traditional high school experience and marginalizes students with physical disabilities, students who receive alternative high school credentials such as GED diplomas, and those pursuing other educational paths.
- Some grantees feel this word implies that students require no further education or training after high school graduation.
- Grantees and teachers overwhelmingly support these goals for students.

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

Every student in America should walk across the stage at their high school graduation as a confident life-long learner equipped with the knowledge skills and mindset they need to be successful and lead a productive fulfilling life

Focus on equity and include diverse and nontraditional experiences.

Grantees in particular want to ensure that deeper learning’s vision is not overly focused on a traditional high school experience. Many work with children and young adults outside of a traditional classroom setting, whose experiences may not be reflected by references to graduation or walking across the stage. Grantees also want to see equity as an explicit value and goal of deeper learning, with prominent and frequent language that reflects this commitment.

“I might not always use the ‘walk across the stage’ part—not every student is able to walk across a stage (it’s picky, but there are those with disabilities and also, those who complete [high school] requirements through alternative programs like GED etc.)” –Grantee

“Many of our target students are nontraditional ... overage/undercredited, taking courses in community college, online, etc. The emphasis on a stage and high school paints a more traditional and staid picture than we are about or want to be conveying as we reinvent education for the future for our most marginalized students.” –Grantee

“Can we be more explicit about equity here? Every student, including and especially underserved or disenfranchised students, in America should” –Grantee

Deeper Learning Values

Current Language

Through Deeper Learning practices, we work to advance the following values in public education:

- **Opportunity.** Teachers and administrators recognize the inherent potential in all students and hold them to **high standards** while providing the resources and support students need to take advantage of educational opportunities.
- **Responsibility.** Students are **empowered** to **direct their own learning** and have responsibility for monitoring and evaluating progress toward their goals.
- **Ownership.** Teachers, parents and communities work together with administrators, school boards and policymakers to build **tailored education experiences** that give students the knowledge and skills to succeed in school and in life.

Most grantees and teachers support this emphasis on quality, though some feel it implies students don't want success or won't hold themselves to a high standard without support.

Both grantees and teachers dislike the implication that students alone are responsible for their success and want to include teachers, parents and communities.

Grantees and teachers frequently use empowerment to describe their goals for students; many prefer it to equip, which seems to imply that student won't require any additional training or education after graduation.

Many grantees appreciate giving students agency, though some argue that this concept applies more so to high school students, making deeper learning less inclusive of K-12 as a whole.

Some grantees feel that ownership better reflects the second bullet point, while responsibility or shared responsibility better reflects the third.

Grantees support this emphasis on individualized support for students, which most feel is key to promoting equity in education.

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

Through deeper learning practices we work to advance the following values in public education

Opportunity Teachers and administrators recognize the inherent potential in all students and hold them to high standards while providing the resources and support students need to take advantage of educational opportunities

Responsibility Students are empowered to direct their own learning and have responsibility for monitoring and evaluating progress toward their goals

Ownership Teachers parents and communities work together with administrators school boards and policymakers to build tailored education experiences that give students the knowledge and skills to succeed in school and in life

Ensure that students receive support as well as empowerment.

Grantees and teachers support the idea of student agency and ownership over learning, perhaps directing their own experiences to a degree, but they do not want to suggest that students are solely responsible for their own success. Responsibility and ownership are important concepts, but many grantees and teachers feel they are mislabeled in the current message and do not fully articulate goals and expectations for students, parents and communities.

“When speaking about ‘responsibility’ in the section of ‘deeper learning values,’ I interpreted this as students realizing and knowing they have the ability to succeed in the future with the support of caring educators.” **–Teacher**

“Kids live up to expectations. Holding them to high standards suggests kids are tethered to something and do not want it in and of themselves. This implies [that] all the system (adults) needs to do is to provide the educational opportunities and it is the student’s responsibility to take advantage.” **–Grantee**

“We would use the term ownership for the definition that now comes after responsibility. Also, I don’t agree with the statement that students have responsibility unless it’s also clear they are supported to do so and how. Similarly, I think responsibility fits a bit better for the last bullet ... and even then, would think ‘shared responsibility’ or some other cooperative term is a better header. Either way, ownership doesn’t make sense and goes contra to how most of us in the student-centered field use it (which is to denote student agency, not community).” **–Grantee**

Deeper Learning Motivation

Current Language

<p>We believe that each and every student has the right to the educational opportunities they need to graduate high school and choose their own path to success in life—whether that’s starting a career or continuing on to college.</p>	<p>Respondents define equity as students receiving the support they require based on their needs and experiences, not just access to quality opportunities.</p>
<p>We believe that our public education system plays a crucial role in upholding our American values of equality and opportunity. Schools teach students to become hardworking, responsible citizens who engage productively in civic and economic life.</p>	<p>Most grantees and teachers support educational programs that prepare students for multiple possible outcomes.</p> <p>This term is fraught in the current political climate, and some teachers and grantees argue that these values aren’t uniquely American.</p> <p>Equality does not necessarily mean equity, as equity implies giving every student personalized support.</p> <p>Some grantees and teachers serve undocumented students, who are not reflected in a literal reading of this phrase.</p> <p>An emphasis on productivity may reinforce unhealthy capitalistic ideals.</p>

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

<p>We believe that each and every student has the right to the educational opportunities they need to graduate high school and choose their own path to success in life whether that's starting a career or continuing on to college We believe that our public education system plays a crucial role in upholding our American values of equality and opportunity Schools teach students to become hardworking responsible citizens who engage productively in civic and economic life</p>

Avoid overemphasizing patriotic and economic benefits to deeper learning.

References to citizenship and American values have taken on a new, fraught meaning since the 2016 election, and many grantees and teachers are uncomfortable with this language. In addition, grantees and teachers worry that this language is overly focused on and supportive of the current economic system, emphasizing a molding and preparation for preordained roles instead of actualization as human beings and members of their communities.

“These days, ‘American values’ has lost its more positive connotation. I don’t really like the framing in terms of ‘responsible’ ‘productive’ citizens. I want citizens who will challenge the system and force us decide what our values really are.” –Grantee

“Responsible citizens: A lot of our kids in our schools are not legally citizens and currently don’t have that option—so I prefer not to use discourse that obscures that painful reality (at least as it exists in current policy). I might say instead ‘members of the community.’” –Grantee

“Deeper Learning, by our view, is about preparing students with the real-life skills (both hard and soft) they need to succeed—the idea of being a hardworking citizen who contributes to economic life harkens a bit back to the utilitarian high school language of the early 1900s.” –Grantee

“When I hear [the] statement ‘pursue a career or go to college,’ it seems like we are referring to someone else’s child; when in reality, most parents would want a path that combines both.” –Grantee

Importance of Improving Education

Current Language

Our schools have not kept pace with a rapidly changing world, and were designed to prepare students for jobs that no longer exist. The content emphasized in curricula, the way they're taught, and the overall structure of schools fail to help students develop critical skills—such as communicating effectively, thinking critically, and working with others.

However, dedicated teachers all over the country work tirelessly to give students the opportunity to practice and develop these skills. These teachers already know what works in their classrooms. We work to elevate their ideas and make sure that they have the tools, resources and support to provide high-quality educational opportunities to each and every student.

We must work closely with schools, teachers, parents, and communities to ensure all students are able to develop these critical skills. If we don't, we risk losing out on a generation's worth of ideas and innovation critical to making our country competitive in a global economy and to keeping our democracy strong.

This message could center on equity by highlighting that some schools, largely in higher income neighborhoods, have kept pace, while those serving communities further from opportunity often have not.

A focus on job preparation diminishes education's role in cultivating students as well-rounded people and community members.

Teachers and grantees don't want to focus on content so as to avoid larger debates about national and state standards.

Focus instead on teachers actively helping students develop skills, rather than as more passive facilitators of student practice.

Many teachers and grantees disagree with this statement, though teachers affirmed that they generally recognize their limits and are eager to learn.

This generalization suggests that all students will fail in the current system regardless of race, class, religion and other factors, which is unlikely. Grantees and teachers instead emphasize the need to focus on the system's disproportionate impact on those farthest from opportunity.

Grantees and teachers want more explicitly progressive goals reflected in messaging, so it is better to avoid a heavy focus on economic or political output.

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

Our schools have not kept pace with a rapidly changing world and were designed to prepare students for jobs that no longer exist. The content emphasized in curricula the way they're taught and the overall structure of schools fail to help students develop critical skills such as communicating effectively thinking critically and working with others. However, dedicated teachers all over the country work tirelessly to give students the opportunity to practice and develop these skills. These teachers already know what works in their classrooms. We work to elevate their ideas and make sure that they have the tools resources and support to provide high-quality educational opportunities to each and every student. We must work closely with schools teachers parents and communities to ensure all students are able to develop these critical skills. If we don't we risk losing out on a generation's worth of ideas and innovation critical to making our country competitive in a global economy and to keeping our democracy strong.

Recognize inequities between schools and give credit to those making efforts to improve.

While many teachers and grantees agree that the education system does not help all students succeed in and out of the classroom, they want to acknowledge that many schools recognize these challenges and are actively trying to improve. Furthermore, they want to acknowledge that some schools are performing well, and many students, particularly those coming from privilege, do and will continue to succeed in the current system. Schools, teachers and students do not all experience the same challenges, and teachers and grantees want to avoid collapsing all experiences into one overly negative image. Lastly, grantees in particular feel this message focuses too heavily on preparation for the workplace, and is not concerned enough with schools' roles in developing a thriving society.

“Yes. I think that most schools are well aware of this problem. Saying that all schools have not kept pace is a mistake. Schools are trying frantically to keep pace, but it is a process that is going to take a long time. Things in our world are changing so much and so quickly that there is no one way to meet the kids' needs.” –Teacher

“This is a deficit-based approach. Perhaps shift the messaging to be asset based. The motivation for our [educational] system to evolve should not be fear—it should be curiosity, exploration and human growth.” –Grantee

“Seems too apocryphal to say ‘a generation's worth’—it's not that a generation is going to lose, there's still plenty of privileged students getting deeper learning who will be fine regardless of their education thanks to their social capital. It's that our economy and democracy are threatened by the fact that gaps are going to become wider as pace of change speeds up if we don't ensure vastly more students have access to deeper teaching, learning, assessment and experiences.” –Grantee

“Is this about democracy? Or about the world? I am not sure I like the economic/political argument here. [Education] is not about being competitive in the global economy, rather it is about making the world a better place for each human being on the planet.” –Grantee

Importance of Deeper Learning for Improving Educational Outcomes

Current Language

Deeper Learning practices are based on the experiences of real teachers in real classrooms, in addition to rigorous research that explores how students of all ages learn skills like critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration.

Grantees and teachers feel using and reiterating the word real is unnecessary.

But we know that there are no one-size-fits-all approaches when it comes to education.

Grantees and teachers feel an emphasis on flexibility and a lack of “silver bullet” approaches is important.

That's why Deeper Learning practices are flexible enough to be adapted to all kinds of learning environments and can be easily integrated into existing curricula.

Grantees and teachers are dubious that these practices can be “easily” incorporated into existing lessons and approaches; they want acknowledgement of the real pedagogical challenges that teachers face in the classroom.

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

Deeper learning practices are based on the experiences of real teachers in real classrooms in addition to rigorous research that explores how students of all ages learn skills like critical thinking problem solving and collaboration. But we know that there are no one-size-fits-all approaches when it comes to education. That's why deeper learning practices are flexible enough to be adapted to all kinds of learning environments and can be easily integrated into existing curricula.

Do not underestimate the effort required to make deeper learning happen.

Teachers appreciate that deeper learning is based on research and the realities of the classroom, and that it provides a flexible framework and avoids one-size-fits-all approaches. However, grantees in particular want to avoid suggesting that deeper learning is a simple set of practices easily plugged into any school or classroom.

“Evidence shows that integrating deeper learning takes serious and significant work and we shouldn’t minimize that or try to hide it. The benefits outweigh the investment, but the investment of time and the initial frustration some schools see when they first attempt to integrate deeper learning practices are real and should be acknowledged.”

–Grantee

“This is the part I found most motivating because it makes the program flexible by not providing a one-size-fits-all approach. Every student is different, every grade is different, every school is different, and every community is different. I appreciate that an effort to understand all of these factors will be made in order to be effective.” –Teacher

“The reason I ranked this low is it leads one to believe deeper learning is a set of practices. We use deeper learning as the north star, the descriptors of the learning we want to achieve, the what of the learning. This is distinct from the how of learning, which can be achieved around a set of principles like personalized learning, student ownership and engagement in the learning process, etc.” –Grantee

Part 3: Competency Language

Master Content Knowledge

Current Language

Our goal for students:

Students **apply knowledge** from their classes to other subjects and to their lives outside of school.

This ability is foundational for student success and represents a goal that most teachers and grantees have for their students.

What it looks like in the classroom:

In addition to teaching core subjects, classroom activities give students opportunities to apply their knowledge to a **range of challenging tasks**.

Grantees and teachers dislike the distinction between teaching and applying subject matter.

A more explicit connection between classroom activities and life outside of school will help illustrate the value of what students are learning.

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

Students **apply knowledge** from their classes to other subjects and to their lives outside of school. In addition to teaching core subjects, classroom activities give students opportunities to **apply their knowledge** to a range of challenging tasks.

Emphasize student understanding, not just retention and application.

Teachers and grantees worry that this language simplifies teachers' roles to an emphasis on direct instruction and lecturing as opposed to the facilitation of deep understanding. The passage also skips over student development of deep understanding to instead focus immediately on the subject matter's application. Lastly, some teachers and grantees want to acknowledge the intrinsic value of academic study and thorough exploration of a subject matter separate from any "practical" application.

"It is not 'in addition to teaching core subjects.' Mastering content is the ability of a student to understand, dissect and apply knowledge concepts and ideas to range of challenging tasks. 'In addition to teaching' sends the message to teachers that 'First I teach (direct instruction) then students do something with some of the knowledge I front-loaded on to them.'" –**Grantee**

"Something about this language gives me pause but not sure what—maybe it's the assumption that content knowledge within its own domain is suggested to be unimportant? The deep mastery of a field can be its own value, too, I think, and belongs in deeper learning." –**Grantee**

"[Master content knowledge] is a positive competency because what children learn in the classroom often does not apply to their outside lives. Strengthening that link could only be positive." –**Teacher**

"I would like to see first something like 'students gain deep conceptual [understanding] that enables them to...' apply knowledge etc. You can only apply when you have deep understanding." –**Grantee**

"'Classroom activities' seems to limit the application to 'lives outside of school.' Could this be more something more open (e.g., learning activities) to signal learning happens everywhere." –**Grantee**

Think Critically

Current Language

Our goal for students:

Students seek out information, critically analyze that information, and use evidence to support their conclusions.

This behavior is foundational to critical thinking; grantees and teachers want to further emphasize the importance of curiosity in driving this behavior.

What it looks like in the classroom:

Lessons expose students to a variety of tools for solving problems, including data analysis, statistical reasoning and scientific inquiry, as well as creativity, nonlinear thinking and persistence.

Grantees and teachers note that critical thinking skills are foundational and empower students to do more than just solve problems.

Non-STEM skills should be elevated to make this message more inclusive of the humanities and a broader liberal arts curriculum.

While grantees and teachers value and support these traits, many do not immediately associate them with critical thinking.

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

Students **seek** out information **critically analyze** that information *and* **use evidence** to support their conclusions

Lessons expose students to a **variety of tools** for solving problems including **data analysis** **statistical reasoning** *and* **scientific inquiry**

as well as **creativity** **nonlinear thinking** *and* **persistence**

Articulate a more inclusive definition of critical thinking.

Teachers and grantees feel this language overemphasizes STEM skills and problem solving as the primary methods behind critical thinking. They want to see other subject areas as examples and broader illustrated applications of critical thinking. That being said, some grantees and teachers feel that while creativity, nonlinear thinking and persistence can support critical thinking, these qualities are not traditionally associated with this behavior and may confuse those unfamiliar with deeper learning.

“To me I think [think critically] stands out the most positively ... because students won’t always have a multiple-choice problem in life, they will have a set of circumstances and they need to know how to figure out what to do with what they have in front of them.” –**Teacher**

“Critical thinking ought to provide students the tools to become curious about the world and identify ways to make it better, through better understanding. So, critical thinking isn’t just about solving problems, it’s also about creating solutions.” –**Grantee**

“Creativity, divergent thinking, persistence are not typical attributes of critical thinking. These are covered by other ‘Cs’ like creativity, or in our definition of problem solving.” –**Grantee**

“In what it looks like in the classroom, the examples don’t seem to include the kinds of critical thinking and analysis embodied in humanities (e.g., sourcing in history, literary analysis in [English language arts], reasoning and use of rhetoric in civics).” –**Grantee**

Communicate Clearly

Current Language

Our goal for students:

Students communicate their ideas effectively —both verbally and in writing—and are able to listen to and incorporate feedback.

What it looks like in the classroom:

Assignments allow students to practice organizing their thoughts, incorporating feedback, and giving constructive feedback on other students' work.

An emphasis on “incorporating feedback” seems to distract from the broader goals of effective communication, limiting this competency to a classroom application.

This description seems to limit the value and application of the competency to inside the classroom, rather than illustrating its wide-ranging importance.

This ability seems very narrow and prescribed, while effective communication is broader and can take many more forms.

Grantees and teachers feel this skill relates more closely to collaboration than communication.

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

Students **communicate** their ideas effectively both verbally and in writing and are able to listen to and incorporate feedback. Assignments allow students to practice organizing their thoughts incorporating feedback and giving constructive feedback on other students' work.

Broaden the definition and application of communication.

Grantees and teachers feel the language used to describe effective communication is overly narrow and prescribed, overemphasizing feedback in a classroom setting. They want to see multimedia communication, complex idea and data communication, persuasion, and advocacy reflected as goals for students.

“The most important [competency] for my students to develop would be to communicate (talk to each other). Nobody in the class can hear you if you don’t speak up and let others know what you need or want.” –**Teacher**

“We don’t talk about these items in the realm of communication, but cover them more in ‘collaboration’—they’re fine attributes, just [applied] to a different competency for us. Also—side note—for us, communication skills involve using a variety of methods and tools (tech enabled). Increasingly, the ability to utilize automated systems, understand the norms of asynchronous versus synchronous communication vehicles, is a critical component of being an effective communicator.” –**Grantee**

“No changes. Although given the importance of communicating visually and with data in today’s world, I would note that this is something that we think about.” –**Grantee**

“What is missing for me in this is audience. ‘Assignments’ seems ‘schoolish’ to me. We aspire to more. Communicating is about a lot more than organizing thoughts and giving and receiving feedback. Students accomplish something in the real world and communicate what they’ve accomplished. They do original work and then publish that work. They go to the city council to advocate for a change in their community.” –**Grantee**

Work Collaboratively

Current Language

Our goal for students:

Students cooperate with others, identify challenges, and incorporate multiple points of view to reach collective goals.

What it looks like in the classroom:

Students work on projects in groups that expose them to different backgrounds and perspectives. They are encouraged to recognize and build on each team member's unique strengths as they work together toward a shared goal.

This word does not connote productive collaboration for all grantees and teachers; some feel it overemphasizes politeness and the ability to get along.

Grantees and teachers appreciate the more explicit commitment to equity and progressive values.

Grantees and teachers note that classroom group projects are the standard marker of collaboration, but these projects are not always effective and are not the only possible method.

Exposure is only the first step towards mutual understanding and productive collaboration, but this statement goes no further.

The importance of assuming different roles within a collaborative environment should be emphasized, rather than focusing on and building existing strengths.

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

Students cooperate with others identify challenges and incorporate multiple points of view to reach collective goals Students work on projects in groups that expose them to different backgrounds and perspectives They are encouraged to recognize and build on each team member's unique strengths as they work together toward a shared goal

Ensure students have the opportunities to perform various group roles.

Teachers and grantees want to ensure that students can practice the different parts of a group dynamic, such as leadership and decision-making roles as well as more supporting functions. Teachers in particular do not want students to focus exclusively on building existing strengths. Instead, they want to expose students to real world realities where team members must do what is required—which may include building new skills or completing undesirable tasks—to accomplish collective goals.

“I am a huge advocate for children working well with other children, teachers, etc. So under ‘work collaboratively’ I think it is important in any educational environment for students to be able to cooperate with others and be respectful and understanding of different backgrounds, religions, languages, etc.” **–Teacher**

“I like all of the competencies and the one that stands out for me is working collaboratively. This can be challenging for many students, but they need to understand that they can learn from other students and vice versa. I always tell my students we don’t always agree on everything, but we should value everyone’s opinions/statements.” **–Teacher**

“We avoid mentioning group projects because that’s the standard default that confirms teachers’ biases that they’re already doing collaboration well in class. Typical group projects offer very limited opportunities for quality collaboration practice. Students should be able to work productively to produce common work with diverse team members.” **–Grantee**

“This seems to imply an individual rather than the group identifying a project. Students also collaborate in ways that are not groups—with peers giving feedback and also with community members, mentors, experts. This is too narrow.” **–Grantee**

“In addition to this, I’d also suggest saying something about students taking on different roles within the group, so that there’s not just a honing of unique strengths, but also the opportunity to practice other strengths.” **–Grantee**

Learn How to Learn

Current Language

Our goal for students:

Students monitor and direct their own learning, both in and out of the classroom.

What it looks like in the classroom:

Students set goals and track their progress successfully completing tasks or solving problems. Teachers can help them recognize when they need help and know how to ask for it.

Grantees and teachers strongly support this idea but don't want to place the onus for successful education completely on students.

This process should emphasize the importance of self-reflection and a growth mindset in addition to goal setting and progress tracking.

Teachers and grantees find this phrase to be very rote, overly teacher driven and unengaging.

While teachers and grantees support this sentiment, it deemphasizes teachers' roll in providing instruction and conferring knowledge.

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

Students monitor and direct their own learning both in and out of the classroom. Students set goals and track their progress successfully completing tasks or solving problems. Teachers can help them recognize when they need help and know how to ask for it.

Emphasize self-reflection and curiosity in addition to tracking progress.

Grantees and teachers feel the current language focuses too closely on student progress tracking and goal achievement, to the exclusion of cultivating curiosity and reflecting on growth. Actual learning does not seem to be the emphasis in the current language. Lastly, these descriptions seem to marginalize the teacher's role and do not articulate how teachers can help students develop the curiosity and growth mindset required to learn how to learn.

"I think the most important competency is the ability to learn how to learn. With today's technology (which isn't slowing down any time soon), being independent and learning information on your own can literally take you anywhere." **–Teacher**

"The one that stands out for me is 'learn how to learn.' Students must be equipped to know how they learn and pursue their own learning, instead of waiting for learning to be spoon-fed to them. Teachers are challenged with motivating students to think on their own and not wait for someone to tell them how they should think." **–Teacher**

"Learning to learn is about more than just monitoring learning and progress. It is also about taking initiative, engaging in curiosity, etc.... This feels more about tracking progress than about learning. 'Completing tasks' feels very teacher driven." **–Grantee**

"What's here is ok—but nothing beyond students setting and tracking goals. Self-reflection, accurate self-assessment, self-advocacy by students is key." **–Grantee**

Build an Academic Mindset

Current Language

Our goal for students:

Students are excited about coming to school and engaged in the subjects they are learning.

What it looks like in the classroom:

Classrooms are designed to be communities where students feel a sense of belonging —and take pride in themselves and their fellow students.

Many grantees and teachers disagree with this definition of an academic mindset, believing that mindsets refer more to curiosity, scholarship and other concepts rather than solely a sense of excitement.

Teachers and grantees agree that engagement is important but want to emphasize how engagement relates to other factors, such as if curricula are relevant to students' lived experiences.

Grantees and teachers want to emphasize learning over classroom study, noting that many educational models now include extracurricular learning opportunities.

This concept is vitally important to teachers and grantees but should connect more explicitly to the mindsets of curiosity, scholarship and growth.

Teacher and Grantee Feedback

Students are excited about coming to school and engaged in the subjects they are learning. Classrooms are designed to be communities where students feel a sense of belonging take pride in themselves and their fellow students.

Ensure this language reflects the field's definition of *academic mindset*.

Grantees and teachers are most confused by this competency. Many teachers question their ability to cultivate this mindset in students when so many other environmental, social and other pressures are outside of their control. Other teachers are not exactly sure what an “academic mindset” is and wonder whether the competency refers to growth mindset, critical thinking or learning how to learn instead. Many grantees feel this language relates more to school culture and misrepresents what academic mindsets mean in the field.

“I would probably change the last competency to say growth mindset rather than ‘academic’ mindset. Growth mindset would be the umbrella and academic mindset could be one of the spokes. Otherwise, I would agree.”

–Teacher

“The one that seems out of place to me (or at least the one I wouldn’t have thought of) is the competency that discusses the need to be comfortable in the classroom or school setting. I had not thought of that as a part of being a successful student, but I agree that students need to be able to survive and thrive whatever the situation may be.”

–Teacher

“With the exception of [building an academic mindset], the competencies accurately reflect my experiences. The last one is a bit more difficult because a student’s attitude about school, in large part, comes from the value that is placed on education and learning from home.”

–Teacher

“This seems more about school culture than academic mindsets—mindsets are about curiosity, scholarship, etc.... this feels like it really misses the mark for me. It also doesn’t mention the role of educators in building the mindsets... or the culture.”

–Grantee

“The classroom description seems to be weakly related to academic mindsets. We think of academic mindsets as students perceiving themselves as learners. Belonging is a part of that of course, but a student can feel a strong sense of social belonging without it being associated with academic mindsets.”

–Grantee



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