



*Framework for  
High Performing 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
Middle School Classrooms*

*“Learning for All . . . Whatever It Takes”*

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

*“Education is not the filling of a pail,  
but the lighting of a fire.”*

*-William Butler Yeats*

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

*-Unknown*



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# Foreword


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

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

How does the West Virginia public school system meet these demands? I propose four initiatives. First, we must refine our vision of the kind of graduate we should produce to include competence in 21<sup>st</sup> century content, skills and tools. Certainly, we must assure the basics of literacy and numeracy for all students. But we also must develop students who are competent in the ability to think critically, to apply knowledge at high levels, to exhibit personal and work place productivity skills and use technology tools to assemble, communicate and analyze information. Second, we must develop higher quality assessments that rigorously assess 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge and skills; assessments for learning designed to guide teacher instructional planning and student self-reflection and goal setting. Third, we must develop support systems that tap the creativity and enthusiasm of our talented educators. I believe given the appropriate conditions for collaboration and professional learning, West Virginia educators will rise to the occasion. This approach must involve time for teachers and principals to meet and to plan and to use the sound processes of continuous improvement and systemic change. Fourth, we must align our vision across all stakeholders and remove the barriers to change. Disparate political agendas, development of conflicting policies and resistance to basic structural change are barriers to true systemic reform.

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

Sincerely,



Dr. Steven L. Paine  
State Superintendent of Schools

## *Rationale*

# *Framework for High Performing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classrooms*

There is no single recipe that prescribes how to become a high performing middle level school with high performing 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms. Nor is there a single exhaustive list of all the “ingredients.” Improvement is highly contextual, dependent on the coming together of many factors. Policymakers have tried for decades to improve the quality of public education through prescriptions, primarily through measures that increase accountability and define such things as graduation requirements, curriculum standards and assessment procedures. Although progress has been made, most would agree that schools across America remain on a challenging journey to accomplish the dual mission of quality and equity in student results. Accomplishing the equity standard of “Learning for All” and developing graduates knowledgeable of and competent in rigorous 21<sup>st</sup> century content, skills and tools will continue to require significant transformation of culture, practices and improvement processes.

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

To bring about wide-scale improvement and to meet the new mission of “Learning for All,” there must be systemic change. This means aligning the efforts of state education agencies, local school districts, and principals and teachers toward (1) common agreement on the results to be produced by high performing middle level schools and (2) the structures and processes necessary for achieving those results. *The Framework for High Performing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Middle Level Classrooms* is intended to define the middle level school teacher’s unique role in this systemic change. This framework aligns with the district document, *Framework for High Performing 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Systems*, and the school document, *The Framework for High Performing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Middle Level Schools*. It is based on the three-component model that describes (1) the teacher’s role in school culture, (2) the classroom practices of the 21<sup>st</sup> century middle level school teacher and (3) the teacher’s role in the school’s continuous improvement. As with the other documents, *the classroom framework* describes conclusions reached from research on practices and processes of America’s best middle level teachers and from reviewing recommendations of national and state reports on creating 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms.

This document can be a valuable tool for middle level school administrators and teachers. First, it can create a vivid mental picture of how high performing middle level school teachers operate. Thus, it can be a basis for principals and teachers to analyze classroom culture, practices and processes, and determine relative strengths and weaknesses. Second, it can set the stage for creating powerful learning communities within which the middle level school staff can learn and implement strategies necessary to produce 21<sup>st</sup> century outcomes for students. Third, it can become the basis for working cooperatively with the school administrators, local board of education and central office staff to restructure the school and change policies and procedures that may be impeding results. Fourth, it can align the district, school and classroom vision of effective practice thus preventing the “top-down” feeling that schools and teachers may experience. Finally, it can be a basis for designing professional development at the local, regional and state level. Using this united and systemic approach, West Virginia middle level schools will move forward and perhaps lead the nation in producing graduates who are post-secondary ready and who have the skills necessary to find a productive place in the global digital society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## *Vision of the High Performing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Middle Level School*

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

### **THE MIDDLE LEVEL LEARNER**

Young adolescents

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

### **THE VISION**

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

# The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom Teacher

## **Changes in Roles and Responsibilities**

The systemic changes necessary to achieve “Learning for All” and for developing students prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century require significant transformation of roles, responsibilities, knowledge and skills of classroom teachers. For decades, teachers have played a largely autonomous role, being almost totally responsible for making the decisions affecting the classroom. What to teach, how long to teach it, when to teach it and the methods used to teach were all individual teacher decisions. The principal ran the school; the teacher ran the classroom. The district established broad policies, provided resources and transported students. Unfortunately, this loosely coupled arrangement did not always produce effective results. Dr. Lawrence Lezotte, noted researcher in effective schools, has commented on the fallacy of this mental model of “independent action.” “If schools were all K-12 institutions like the one-room schoolhouse of old, educators would have little need to focus on systemic approaches to delivery of curriculum and instruction. But today’s school systems are highly complex interrelated organizations in which high levels of collaboration and cooperation are necessary to produce success for all.”

## **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teacher as Collaborator**

Today’s 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher must operate in a broader sphere of influence than ever before. Certainly, the primary and most critical role of the teacher is as the master facilitator of student learning in the classroom. The singularly important role of the teacher in creating classroom conditions for student success remains constant. This role, however, is necessary, *but not sufficient*, to bring about high levels of success for all students in the school. Teachers must play a significant role outside the confines of their classroom. 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers must see themselves as part of a broader school team dedicated to (1) shaping a cohesive school-wide culture characterized by consistent and pervasive core beliefs and practices and (2) creating a “school-wide learning community” that collaborates, utilizes technology tools, analyzes data, problem solves and plans strategically to improve school-wide conditions that lead to student success. Dr. Lezotte defined an *ineffective* school as, “a series of self-employed individuals joined by a common hallway.” Thus, an effective school (and an effective school district) is where there are high levels of collaboration, coordination, cooperation and problem solving among all the adults in the school.

## **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teacher as the Master Facilitator of Learning**

As teachers begin to see their roles and responsibilities differently in the context of the school, they also must see their roles differently in their own classrooms. First, teachers must see their roles differently in terms of the student results they produce. In the past, the classroom instructional model was based on covering the curriculum in a “teach, test, go on” process. In this process, all students got the same instruction and the same time to achieve success, resulting in a bell curve distribution of success (some students did well, some did not). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century standards-based model, time and strategies are differentiated so that all students reach mastery and beyond. Second, the teachers must see their roles differently in the instructional process. The outdated view of the teacher as the central dispenser of knowledge no longer works in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. In the digital age, students can access knowledge from multiple sources worldwide 24 hours a day. Thus, the teacher becomes the facilitator of the learning process, helping and guiding students through well-constructed instructional strategies that build meaning and understanding. Increasingly, students must take on the role of worker, setting goals and assessing their own progress toward identified instructional targets. Third, the teacher must see the design of the instructional process differently. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom, mastery of content, proficiency with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills, relevance to real world situations and use of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology tools become the critical components of good instructional design. As appropriate, the teacher must combine these elements in meaningful and engaging instructional processes. Fourth, the teacher must see student assessment processes differently by understanding the importance of a balanced assessment system. In a bell curve environment, assessments are used primarily to grade students. In a 21<sup>st</sup> century environment, students are asked to perform authentic assessments that truly demonstrate proficiency and allow the teacher to redirect and reconstruct the instructional process.

## *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom Teacher (continued)*

### **Becoming a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teacher**

West Virginia classrooms are led daily by truly outstanding teachers. A high percentage of West Virginia teachers hold advanced degrees, spend time beyond minimal requirements in professional development opportunities and, in increasing numbers, are becoming Nationally Board Certified. Becoming more proficient in the instruction of 21<sup>st</sup> century content, learning skills, technology tools and assessments is part of a natural progression in professional growth. Just as physicians today should no longer use the medicine, the techniques or the diagnostic tools of 50 years ago, educators must access and use the latest tools and research that can accelerate and improve student learning. When researcher Dr. Lawrence Lezotte said that creating effective schools means being dedicated to “Learning for All,” he meant not only *all students* but also *learning for all professionals*. Thus, all teachers should be encouraged to begin a journey to understand and integrate 21<sup>st</sup> century content, learning skills, technology tools and assessments in their classroom. This is not an *overnight journey*; it is a personal commitment to *continue to grow professionally*, all the time learning what will bring greater success to the students served. Fortunately, in the near future, there will be many opportunities for teachers to participate in exciting and meaningful professional development opportunities on 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching. These include such offerings as West Virginia Department of Education online professional development courses, courses offered through higher education institutions, and courses and workshops offered through 21<sup>st</sup> century partners. There are also numerous quality Web sites and other resources that can broaden personal understanding of content and applications (e.g., West Virginia Department of Education - 21<sup>st</sup> Century Digital Resource, <http://wvde.state.wv.us/21stcenturydigitalresource>; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, [www.21stcenturyskills.org](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org); the International Society for Technology in Education, [www.iste.org](http://www.iste.org); The Metiri Group, [www.metiri.com](http://www.metiri.com); enGauge, [www.ncrel.org/engauge/skills](http://www.ncrel.org/engauge/skills)). The important thing is to begin the journey. Like any journey, this ONE will most likely be filled with new sights, new insights and a sense of greater understanding and perspective on the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom.

### **Supporting the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teacher**

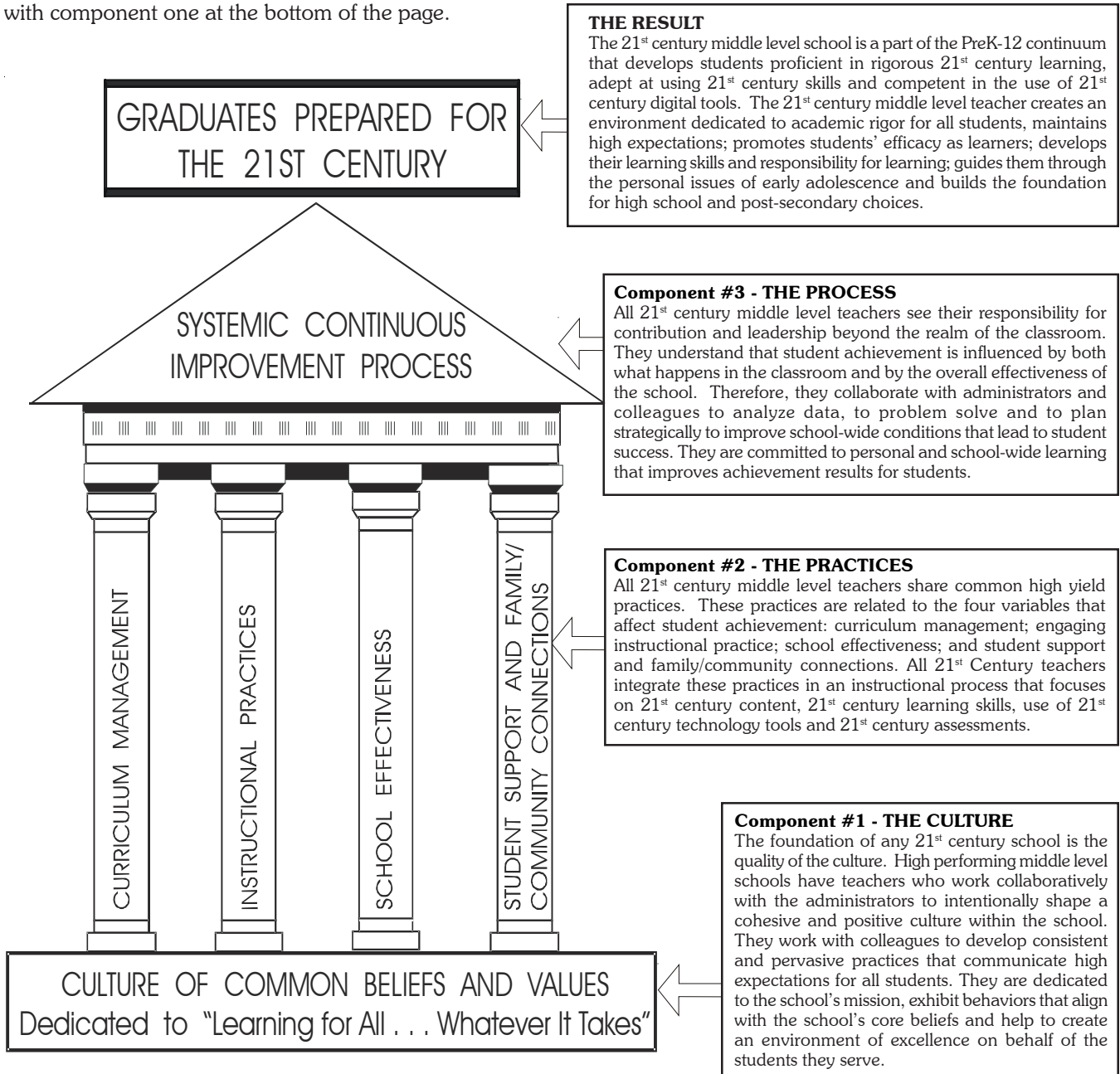
Creating 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms should be part of a systemic process that supports and encourages classroom teachers. *This is not something that teachers can be expected to do by themselves.* Policymakers at the federal, state and local levels must look for more effective ways to offer professional development, to provide time for individual and group planning and to expand the access to quality technology tools for all teachers and students. Compared to other leading economic powers, America is one of a few nations that provides so little time for its teachers to effectively plan and work with colleagues to improve student performance. If America is to maintain its world economic standing, then it must invest in and support those who educate for its future. Teaching is a highly complex, interactive and challenging process. Teachers who master its complexities and bring students to high levels of proficiency deserve to be the most honored among us. Implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> century elements in the classroom not only gives students the kind of education they need for success in a digital global age but allows teachers to demonstrate the skill and creativity that bring satisfaction and joy to the teaching process. Teachers deserve the support needed to make this happen.



# Framework Overview

## The Middle Level Teacher's Role in Developing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Graduates

High performing 21<sup>st</sup> century middle level school teachers are active participants in the three broad components of school improvement: the culture, the practices and the process. These three components align to develop graduates prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First, high performing middle level school teachers help to develop a cohesive culture of high expectations for students and staff. Second, these teachers use high yield practices in curriculum management; instructional practice; school effectiveness; and student support and family/community connections. Third, the teachers have a personal commitment to systemic continuous improvement. When reading the boxes at the right, please begin with component one at the bottom of the page.



## *Component 1*

# *The Culture of High Performing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Middle Level School*

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

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

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

- where staff have a shared sense of purpose, where they pour their hearts into teaching and doing their best to successfully transition all students to the high school prepared with the knowledge, skills and tools necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
- where the underlying norms are of collegiality, improvement and hard work; staff members feel an obligation to improve their skills and to be a contributing partner in solving school problems;
- where staff agrees on practices and processes that will be consistently and pervasively used throughout the school; where norms of behavior are intentionally developed;
- where rituals and traditions celebrate student accomplishment, teacher innovation and parental/community commitments;
- where the staff cherishes stories of success; where heroes and heroines provide a social web of information, support and history of successful ways that the school has served the needs of students; and
- where accomplishment, joy and humor abound.

Strong positive cultures are places with a shared sense of what is important, a shared ethos of caring and concern and a shared commitment to helping students become productive contributors and learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In these cultures, teachers are willing to compromise personal preferences in order to achieve consistency of practice that will positively influence the success of students.

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

## Component 2

### High Yield Practices of the High Performing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Middle Level Classroom “The Four Pillars”

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

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

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



## Curriculum - "What We Teach"

**To assure that all students are taught a rigorous 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum, teachers of high performing 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms:**

- Use a rigorous standards-based curriculum (rather than a textbook approach) based on West Virginia content standards and objectives that integrates 21<sup>st</sup> century content, learning skills and technology tools;
- Use the district and/or school prioritized and mapped curriculum as the basis of instructional planning;
- Establish rigorous and challenging curriculum expectations that focus on deep understand and the ability to use knowledge in real world applications;
- Integrate research-based literacy curriculum in all subjects that includes reading comprehension skills and vocabulary development strategies;
- Implement the school-wide writing model using common rubrics across all content areas and sharing work products at each performance level with students;
- Use a balanced assessment system, which includes authentic classroom assessments for learning, benchmark assessments and summative assessments that provide data to guide curriculum revisions and instructional modifications;
- Embed the six elements of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning throughout the curriculum (see pages 14-17);
- Emphasize 21<sup>st</sup> century content (global awareness; financial, economic and business literacy; civic literacy; and health and wellness) as appropriate in all subject areas across all grade levels;
- Use the articulated advisory curriculum that provides each student with an adult advocate and that addresses student personal growth and development, enhances study skills and prepares/guides students for a rigorous high school curriculum;
- Implement career exploration according to the school plan; understand student career clusters, areas of focus and pathways as they relate to each curricular area;
- Collaborate across and within all curricular areas and grade levels to integrate the curriculum and establish common high expectations for all students; and
- Use a backward design process to develop lessons and units based on the big ideas, concepts and essential questions of interest to young adolescents and aligned with the West Virginia CSOs and the elements of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

## Instruction - "How We Teach"

### To assure that classroom instruction reflects research-based instructional design, management, delivery and assessments, teachers in high performing 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms:

- Create a nurturing and supportive classroom climate where students develop respect for individual differences, positive social/personal skills and ethical behavior through modeling, practice and reinforcement;
- Create and sustain a productive, well-managed classroom with clearly outlined procedures and expectations that includes research-based behavior support programs and promotes self direction;
- Guide students' natural inquisitiveness into productive, disciplined and formalized ways of asking questions and presenting information;
- Create a classroom where all students are actively engaged and construct, modify and integrate ideas by interacting with materials, the world around them and their peers;
- Use techniques and processes that develop student proficiency in the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of information and communication literacy, thinking and problem solving and personal and workplace productivity; help students to synthesize, analyze and formulate critical opinions from diverse sources, such as real world examples, applications and experiences both inside and outside of school;
- Implement research-based instructional strategies that increase student achievement and use multiple teaching and learning approaches that are developmentally responsive, socially equitable and culturally responsive;
- Implement a variety of effective instructional methods that engage students in meaningful tasks (e.g., cooperative learning, critical thinking and problem solving, project-based learning, performance-based activities and meta-cognition);
- Emphasize instruction in reading comprehension skills by using research-based *before, during* and *after* reading strategies in all appropriate subjects and grades;
- Implement research-based vocabulary development strategies, such as explicit teaching and modeling, through repetitive exposure to words in multiple ways and through word-rich classrooms and self-selected reading in a variety of media;
- Integrate writing as an instructional strategy across all subjects and grades, using school-adopted writing rubrics and writing model; assist students in being able to find, organize and report information in various written formats (major reports, research papers and daily writing assignments) for a variety of audiences, using various information and communication technologies (ICT);
- Use multiple ongoing assessments and data-driven decision making to make decisions that guide instruction and provide timely interventions;
- Accelerate the learning of students below mastery through skill analysis and such practices as scaffolding, previewing and explicit vocabulary instruction; and
- Adjust and differentiate instruction to address student's individual learning by adjusting content, process, product, assessments, grouping patterns and time on task to accommodate student learning profiles, readiness and interests using the philosophy of universal design.

## *School Effectiveness - "Where We Teach"*

**To assure that all schools have the leadership, culture and organizational practices representative of effective schools, teachers of high performing of 21<sup>st</sup> century schools:**

- Understand and actively support the mission and goals of the school and school system;
- Understand and role model the core beliefs of the school helping to establish a positive, cohesive school culture;
- Participate in school-wide improvement initiatives and accept responsibility for overall school effectiveness;
- Assist in the development and implementation of the school and school system five-year strategic plan;
- Be knowledgeable of the results of various school-wide and classroom data that provide the basis of school and classroom improvement (e.g., American College Testing Exam, EXPLORE, West Virginia Educational Standards Test, Writing Assessment, National Assessment of Educational Progress and classroom assessments);
- Be a proactive problem solver and solution seeker, looking for ways to continuously improve the overall school performance;
- Collaborate with administrators and colleagues to reach agreement on practices and processes that should be consistent and pervasive throughout the school;
- Develop a risk-free teaching and learning environment that supports creativity and innovation among the staff as well as students;
- Encourage school pride, school loyalty and a sense of teamwork among colleagues, the students, families and the community;
- Support and nurture professional learning communities dedicated to "Learning for All", studying data, sharing ideas, sharing resources, jointly planning and setting mutual goals to improve student achievement;
- Participate in professional development that focuses on school-wide and individual classroom improvements;
- Model high standards of professionalism and ethical behavior through such things as dress, language, demeanor and interactions with students, staff, families and community;
- Be a proactive communicator both in giving and seeking information that promotes teamwork and collaboration; and
- Be knowledgeable of and adhere to the policies and procedures of the school and school system.

## *Student Support and Family/Community Connections - "Who We Teach"*

**To assure that all students receive the support they need to achieve high levels of performance and that all families and community members are treated as valued partners, teachers of high performing 21<sup>st</sup> century schools:**

- Create a classroom climate that develops students' respect for cultural, gender and socioeconomic differences and prepares them for living in a 21<sup>st</sup> century global society;
- Create a classroom environment in which students are involved, valued and respected and one which cultivates meaningful interaction by listening and responding with sensitivity and respect;
- Advocate for students with academic, personal or special needs and use effective school and district processes for assuring that needs are met;
- Accept students and parents as partners in the learning process and be proactive in using strategies that build a shared sense of responsibility and collaboration;
- Establish effective lines of communication with students and families that promote two-way dialogue and respect all families' diverse backgrounds and needs;
- Provide families and the community with opportunities for meaningful involvement in the school and classroom;
- Provide information to students and families regarding expectations of students (e.g., curricular requirements, school and district policies, assessment tools and results, classroom procedures, practices and management);
- Collaborate with families to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the learning environment of the school;
- Use 21<sup>st</sup> century technology tools to facilitate connections and communications among schools, families and communities;
- Effectively transition students and families from elementary to middle level and middle level to high school, as well as between grades within the middle level setting;
- Support an advisory system that advocates advisers or mentors who take an interest in the successful learning, goal setting, career planning and personal growth of a designated group of students;
- Partner with the community for enhanced learning opportunities, making the community visible in the school and the school visible in the community;
- Collaborate with the community in order to
  - facilitate access to community resources that serve the cultural, recreational, academic, health, social and other needs of students and/or families;
  - promote learning beyond the school environment;
  - encourage effective service-learning;
  - encourage school volunteerism;
  - establish business and industry partnerships; and
  - engage in discourse about school programs; and
- Provide an environment that develops and promotes healthy lifestyles and personal wellness and supports families and the community as partners in this effort.

## *Descriptions*

### *The Six Elements of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning*

- 1. A FOCUS ON CORE SUBJECTS** - Core academic subjects remain the foundation of a good education. No Child Left Behind identifies these as **English, reading and language arts; mathematics; science; foreign languages; civics; government; economics; arts; history; and geography**. Standards, objectives and performance descriptors for each core subject are defined in the West Virginia content standards and objectives. No Child Left Behind also requires that students be **technology literate** by the end of the eighth grade. The focus on core subjects must expand beyond minimal mastery to high levels of understanding and skill. Knowledge, learning skills and use of technology tools must be built on a firm foundation of core subjects.
- 2. EMPHASIS ON 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY CONTENT** - Education and business leaders identify four significant, emerging content areas that are critical to success in communities and work places of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Schools need to give greater prominence in the curriculum to these four areas. This emphasis may come from adding additional courses to the curriculum or by emphasizing this content in existing courses. Teachers can add rich understanding of this content by infusing this content in contextual learning experiences. The areas are:
  - **GLOBAL AWARENESS** - Technology is obliterating geographic boundaries and time zones; collaboration and communication across these boundaries is now commonplace. Students need a deeper understanding of the thinking, motivations and actions of different cultures, countries and regions. Global awareness promotes understanding, tolerance and acceptance of ethnic, cultural, religious and personal differences. It also helps students work through the complexities of different points of view that spring from different parts of the world.
  - **FINANCIAL, ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS LITERACY** - Students are and will increasingly be responsible for making sophisticated economic and business choices that will profoundly affect their future. These everyday choices can result in personal prosperity or poor financial decisions. Similarly, most people enter work places after high school without even a rudimentary understanding of various business processes, entrepreneurial spirit or economic forces that shape our lives. Financial, economic and business literacy will help students better manage their personal finances and contribute more productively in workplaces.
  - **CIVIC LITERACY** - The United States needs informed, responsible citizens to participate in the political process. Civic literacy can help students understand, analyze and participate in government and in the community both globally and locally.
  - **HEALTH AND WELLNESS AWARENESS** - Being a successful citizen and worker in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires knowledge and habits that contribute to personal health. With increasing costs in medical care and health insurance and the personal impact on happiness and well-being, students must understand the importance of healthy lifestyles.

Adapted from publications of the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

[www.21stcenturyskills.org](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org)



## *Descriptions*

### *The Six Elements of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (continued)*

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

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

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

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

**4. USING 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY TECHNOLOGY TOOLS TO GAIN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) LITERACY** - Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy is the ability to use technology to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century context knowledge and learning skills, in support of 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning. In a digital world, students need to learn to use the tools that are essential to everyday life and work place productivity. The West Virginia content standards and objectives have been revised to integrate 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills with 21<sup>st</sup> century technology tools, using national technology standards. In West Virginia these are entitled, "Standards for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning." Important 21<sup>st</sup> century technology tools include:

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

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

## *Descriptions*

### *The Six Elements of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (continued)*

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

#### **Summative Assessments of Learning**

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

- Summative assessments measure core subjects aligned to the West Virginia content standards and objectives that include 21<sup>st</sup> century content, learning skills and tools.
- Summative assessments document individual and group achievement status at a point in time.
- Summative assessments are used for accountability and to inform students, educators, parents and the community of student, school and system performance.

#### **Benchmark Assessments of/for Learning**

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

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

#### **Formative Classroom Assessments for Learning**

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

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

Adapted from publications of the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills  
[www.21stcenturyskills.org](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org)

## Descriptions

### *The Six Elements of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (continued)*

#### 6. 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY LEARNING SKILLS

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

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## *Transitioning to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom*

Development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom affects many traditional classroom practices. It also affects the roles and responsibilities of both the teacher and the student. The chart below describes some of the key areas of transformation. It should be noted that there are many high performing teachers in West Virginia who have been exhibiting these 21<sup>st</sup> century characteristics for decades.

<b>Area</b>	<b>20<sup>th</sup> Century Practice</b>	<b>21<sup>st</sup> Century Practice</b>
<b>Teacher's Role</b>	The teacher is the key <i>dispenser of knowledge</i> and is the center of the instructional process. In viewing the classroom, the instructional sequence may center more around the actions of the teacher than the actions of the students.	The teacher <i>facilitates</i> student learning during an intentionally designed and sequenced instructional process. In viewing the classroom, the students are highly engaged and the teacher facilitates that engagement.
<b>Student's Role</b>	The students take little ownership for their own learning. They follow the direction of the teacher, complete work, often at a minimal level, and wait to see what grade they are "given."	The students understand the established expectations, develop plans for completing their work, use rubrics to assess their own learning and understand the level of their own performance.
<b>Student Results</b>	Students receive basically the same instruction and the same amount of instructional time. This leads to student assessment results that generally follow a traditional "Bell Curve" distribution of grades.	Instructional strategies and instructional time are differentiated so that all students can reach mastery and beyond. Student assessment results do not follow a "Bell Curve" distribution since few if any students are below mastery.
<b>Instructional Focus</b>	The primary focus of the instructional process is covering the <i>content</i> included in the established curriculum. Intentional teaching of learning skills and use of learning tools are rare.	The focus of the instructional process is the development of proficiency in <i>three</i> areas: <i>21<sup>st</sup> century content, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills and use of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology tools.</i>
<b>Lesson Design</b>	The lesson design centers on covering pages in the textbook and completion of textbook-driven instructional activities. Assessment processes are designed and administered at the conclusion of the lesson.	Lesson design begins with the end in mind, focusing on the desired student performance outcome and how those outcomes will be assessed. Instructional strategies are designed and differentiated to bring about the desired student performance outcome. Students understand the intent of the lessons and how their performance will be assessed.
<b>Instructional Strategies</b>	Instructional strategies are selected to assist students in the memorization of the content. Teacher lecture, question and answer, and student seat-work may dominate the instructional sequence. The same strategies are employed for all students.	Teachers use a broad range of <i>research-based instructional strategies</i> specifically selected to produce the desired student result. Strategies are incorporated to integrate 21 <sup>st</sup> century content, learning skills and technology tools.
<b>Instructional and Technology Tools</b>	The textbook and other written materials are the primary instructional tools. Use of the overhead projector and occasional use of computers and other digital technology may supplement the process.	Teachers use a broad range of content sources, including primary sources that connect instruction to relevant and authentic learning. Many forms of digital technology and technology-based resources are integrated into the classroom as part of the instructional sequence.
<b>Assessment Practices</b>	Textbook-driven assessments are commonly used, supplemented with teacher-made assessments based on true-false, multiple choice and short answer formats that evaluate content memorization. Students are not always aware of what they are expected to demonstrate on assessments.	Teachers use a variety of assessment processes, formal and informal, to gather authentic information on how well students are achieving intended results. Assessments evaluate content, 21 <sup>st</sup> century skills and proficiency with technology tools. Rubrics are regularly used. Students have a clear understanding of instructional expectations.

## Component 3

### *Systemic Continuous Improvement Process*

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

- 1. Transformational leadership that creates a “learning-centered” system;**  
Staff is dedicated to making the school a place that focuses itself around high levels of student learning for all. All the adults in the building consider themselves “learners” dedicated to developing knowledge and skills that enhance the learning of their students and the overall improvement of the school.
- 2. An expectation that change will be an ongoing continuous process;**  
Staff views change and improvement as a natural part of their professional life. They are dedicated to the concept of “getting better all the time” and actively participate in the initiatives that improve the school.
- 3. Identification of core beliefs that drive improvement efforts;**  
Staff has a mutually developed set of core beliefs that guide personal and organizational action. The beliefs are held in esteem by the staff and are considered inviolate.
- 4. A well-articulated mission that includes a focus on “Learning for All”;**  
Staff is committed to the mission of the school and takes personal action to further that mission in classroom and school-wide initiatives.
- 5. A broad understanding of and commitment to change based on internal and external factors;**  
Staff is open to change and investigates educational research and best practices to inform classroom and school innovations.
- 6. A focus on systemic approaches to design and implementation;**  
When innovations are planned and implemented over time, staff considers how the innovation will impact various aspects of the school, adjusts as appropriate and considers how the innovation will be supported and monitored over time.
- 7. Pervasive use of data both to target and to refine improvement efforts;**  
Staff is knowledgeable of specific classroom and school-wide data on student outcomes as well as international, national and state data that guide educational reform.
- 8. Change initiatives and processes that address the “interrelatedness” of activities and resources;**  
Staff thinks long-term and systemically about changes resisting fads and quick fixes.
- 9. An implementation process that reflects the cycle of “plan, do, study, act”;**  
Staff is committed to long-term planning that implements innovations in appropriate stages and that studies and improves those innovations until they are institutionalized in a quality way.
- 10. A collaboratively developed strategic plan focused on results;**  
Staff owns the direction and strategies described in the school strategic plan; they collaborate annually to update and revise the direction based on student needs.

## *Reflections: Nurturing a Collaborative Spirit*

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

The fundamental mission of public schools has changed from “Learning for Some” to “Learning for All.” The new federal accountability standards require that all students master the essential curriculum regardless of race, ethnicity, poverty, disability or language deficits. This legislation establishes a clear mandate: every student not only has the right to go to school, but also has the right to exit with the knowledge and skills necessary for productive citizenry. Recent national consciousness on the dramatic changes in global economic competitiveness mandate us to strive for higher levels of student performance that address the personal and work place demands of the digital 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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

As we begin this collective journey to build a school system that prepares students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, perhaps our greatest resource will be each other. Though we can learn from those outside our borders, we also must commit to greater collaboration and less competition within our borders. We have a common focus, a common school improvement language and common frameworks; surely then, our collective wisdom and experience can chart the way for collective success. We are not strangers to great challenges. West Virginians are people of great hope, great determination and great heart. Together, we can continue to build a great school system that assures the best for the students we serve.

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

## *Building a Common Language for School Improvement*

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

1. **Benchmarks** – Predetermined points during the instructional term when student mastery of specific instructional objectives is assessed.
2. **Classroom Walkthrough** – A non-evaluative but focused classroom observation made for a brief period of time (3-5 minutes) to observe specific classroom practices; the walkthrough observation is used to enhance reflective practice and to gather school-wide information regarding professional development and school improvement.
3. **Continuous Improvement** – A set of activities designed to bring gradual, but continual, improvement to a process through constant review and refinement.
4. **Correlates of Effective Schools** – The seven characteristics identified from research that enables schools to bring all students to mastery regardless of background factors like poverty, race, gender or ethnicity: Clear and Focused Mission, Safe Orderly Environment, High Expectations for All, Time On Task/Opportunity to Learn, Strong Instructional Leadership, Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress and Positive Home/School Partnerships.
5. **Curriculum Alignment** – The ongoing process of bringing congruence to the written curriculum, taught curriculum and assessed curriculum so 1) all that is assessed has been taught and (2) what is taught encompasses the written curriculum.
6. **Curriculum Management System** – A series of ongoing interrelated activities designed to implement, support, monitor and evaluate the system curriculum to assure that all students have access to and benefit from an aligned, high quality prioritized and sequenced curriculum.
7. **Curriculum Map** – A graphic representation of the recommended instructional sequence for curriculum objectives during the instructional year and across the grades Pre K-12 which is used as a management tool for enhancing curriculum continuity, communication and coordination.
8. **Curriculum Prioritization** – The local consensus process of assigning relative value to curriculum objectives in order to make informed instructional decisions about the amount of time allocated to an objective and the degree to which it is an instructional focus. (*Note: It is recommended that no objective be completely eliminated during the prioritization process*).
9. **Differentiated Instruction** – A systematic approach to planning curriculum and instruction for academically diverse learners; a blend of whole class, group and individual instruction, guided by the three principles of differentiation: respectful tasks, flexible grouping and continual assessment.

## *Building a Common Language for School Improvement (continued)*

10. **Effective Schools Research** – The body of research conducted in the early ‘70s and ‘80s as a response to the Coleman Report, which concluded that schools with certain characteristics or “correlates of achievement” can bring all students to mastery levels regardless of student background characteristics.
11. **Enduring Understanding** – The big ideas and important concepts that are the heart of the content area and have lasting value and application in the student’s life.
12. **Essential Questions** – An expression of inquiry that motivates students to seek broader understanding and deeper meaning of the content objectives.
13. **Formative Assessment** – Periodic evaluation of the student’s achievement level of the West Virginia content standards and objectives used to adjust instructional time and strategies so all students will achieve proficiency and beyond.
14. **High Yield Instructional Strategies** – Categories of instructional activities that have been verified through research to correlate with high student achievement.
15. **Instructional Management Practices** – Commonly agreed upon practices within a school for conducting routine tasks in the classroom and organizing the instructional process.
16. **Instructional Management System** – A series of ongoing interrelated activities designed to implement, support, monitor and evaluate the system’s instructional process to assure that all are engaged in and benefiting from the instructional program.
17. **Learning Community** – A group of educators within a school or school system which works to create a climate that focuses on reflective practice, collegiality and ongoing professional development targeted toward improvement of student learning.
18. **Monitoring System** – An ongoing system to collect data on a program, designed to provide feedback on whether the program is fulfilling its functions, addressing the targeted population and/or producing those services intended; monitoring is different from evaluation; its purpose is to help refine and make “in-course” corrections.
19. **Objective** – Grade and subject specific descriptions of the knowledge and skills needed to achieve proficiency of the content standards.
20. **Organizational Culture** – The overall pattern of beliefs and values of an organization that (a) manifests itself in policies, procedures and organizational structures and (b) ultimately shapes the behavior of personnel.
21. **Pacing Guide** – A graphic representation or “timeline” illustrating the sequence and amount of time allocated to instructional objectives during the school term.
22. **Performance Assessment** - An evaluative method usually judged with a predetermined rubric that requires students to demonstrate a level of proficiency of the West Virginia content standards and objectives by applying knowledge to authentic tasks such as projects, presentations, activities, exercises or problemsolving.
23. **Performance Descriptors** – Narrative explanations of five levels of student achievement (distinguished, above mastery, mastery, partial mastery and novice) used by the teacher to assess student attainment of the West Virginia content standards and objectives.



## *Building a Common Language for School Improvement (continued)*

24. **Prioritization Criteria** – The basis for assigning relative value to curriculum objectives based on (a) the overall importance for a student’s enduring understanding of the content, (b) the importance of the objective as a prerequisite to the next level of learning, (c) the results of prior assessments of student proficiency and (d) the value of the objective on high stakes testing.
25. **Programmatic Level** – The organization of educational programs and services for delivery to students according to the students’ common developmental characteristics: early childhood (Pre-K to grade 4), middle childhood (grade 5 to grade 8) and adolescent education (grade 9 to grade 12).
26. **Proficiency** – The level of student achievement for students who achieve at the “mastery, above mastery, or distinguished” levels.
27. **Reading Comprehension** – The degree to which students derive not only the facts from a written passage but the degree to which they gain an understanding of its meaning; when all teachers within a school use techniques to develop comprehension (pre-reading vocabulary development, guiding questions, graphic organizers, jig saw activities, etc.), overall achievement improves.
28. **Reflective Practice** – An improvement practice designed to promote the teachers’ self analysis of instructional practice by thoughtfully considering their own classroom practices and comparing the results to those of successful practitioners; reflective practice is often accompanied by coaching from skilled practitioners who guide the reflective process.
29. **Rubric** – A predetermined detailed scoring guide used by teachers to communicate and evaluate levels of student performance of a complex task.
30. **School System Transformation** – The rethinking, reorganization and refocusing of school system organizational structures and expectations to achieve the new mission of “Learning for All.”
31. **Standards-Based Curriculum** – A curriculum framework that establishes clear comprehensive exit learning expectations for all students, further defines the expectations through specific grade level and subject objectives and provides performance descriptors for evaluating student level of achievement relative to the West Virginia content standards and objectives.
32. **Standards-Based Unit** – Extended instructional sequence involving several lessons of related objectives organized around a broad theme, enduring understanding or essential question that often culminates in a performance assessment.
33. **Strategic Plan** – A document used by an entity to align its overall organization and budget with its priorities, missions and objectives; a strategic plan should include core beliefs, a mission statement, a description of the agency’s long-term goals and the evidence it will accept as having achieved those goals, objectives, strategies or means the organization plans to use to achieve these goals and objectives, and a description of the specific actions that will be taken; the strategic plan also may identify external factors that could affect achievement of long-term goals.
34. **Student Achievement Variables** – The major variables controlled and/or influenced by the school system that impact student achievement; these variables are quality of curriculum, quality of instruction, quality of school organization and environment, and the family background and characteristics of the student.

## *Building a Common Language for School Improvement (continued)*

35. **Support System** – A network of people who interact and remain in communication for mutual assistance; also, resources, activities and information that enable staff to accomplish assigned responsibilities.
36. **System** – A series of interrelated components designed to achieve a common goal; as applied to a school system, a series of integrated activities, procedures, policies and professional development designed to achieve a common purpose.
37. **Systemic Change** – Change that occurs in all aspects and levels of a system; systemic change requires redesign of fundamental approaches within an organization while considering the effect on all other aspects of the organization.
38. **System-wide School Improvement Cycle** – A series of steps and/or processes expected within each school to develop and implement the school’s strategic plan.
39. **Transformational Leadership** –The ability to affect the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of a significant number of individuals through intentional actions and the creation of a body of work.
40. **Understanding by Design (UbD)** – A three-stage instructional planning framework that helps teachers develop quality standards-based lessons that result in student proficiency and enduring understanding.
41. **Universal Design** – An approach to designing course instruction, material and content to benefit people of all learning styles without adaptation or retrofitting. This approach provides equal access to learning, not simply equal access to information. Universal Design allows the student to control the method of accessing information while the teacher monitors the learning process and initiates any beneficial methods.
42. **Values and Beliefs** – The standards or qualities considered worthwhile and desirable by an organization; the statements, principles or doctrine that the system accepts as true and uses to guide decisions and shape behavior.
43. **Writing to Inform** – Nonfiction writing assignments used to argue, criticize, define, describe, discuss, evaluate, explain, compare and contrast or summarize topics in the classroom; consistent use of writing to inform assignments in all content areas and consistent judging by a commonly used rubric correlates with high student achievement.
44. **WV Written Curriculum** – The written scope and sequence of what students should know and be able to do as the result of the instructional process as defined by the West Virginia content standards and objectives (also referred to as the essential curriculum).





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