

Portraits in Progress: Emerging Future-Ready Skills Assessment Strategies

Executive Summary

In today's dynamic and rapidly changing world, future-ready skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity are increasingly recognized as essential for student success in schooling, postsecondary pursuits, and life. These competencies not only prepare students to navigate complex challenges but also empower them to become lifelong learners with the ability to pursue meaningful goals. To support this vision, many states and districts have adopted Portrait of a Graduate frameworks, which define the future-ready skills and competencies students should develop throughout their educational journey.

Despite their importance, these skills are often overlooked in traditional assessment systems, which tend to focus on content knowledge and standardized measures. Recognizing this gap, Digital Promise and Pearson partnered to explore how districts are assessing future-ready skills. The innovative practices, common challenges, and actionable insights shared here emerged from interviews and in-person convening presentations and discussions with districts leading Portrait of a Graduate efforts.



Findings

✓ Districts are exploring a range of assessment strategies.

Assessment strategies include **curriculum embedded tasks, performance-based assessments, student-led defenses of learning, and scenario-based, tech-enabled assessments**—some of which incorporate artificial intelligence

✓ These approaches aim to meet several goals: **measure student ability, improve instruction, communicate with families, and evaluate Portrait implementation.**

✓ Districts prioritize student-centered assessments that emphasize **growth, self evaluation, and feedback** over claims of proficiency.

✓ Districts face challenges ensuring the **reliability** and **validity** of their assessments, particularly when developing rubrics and tools that are **comparable** and adaptable to **local contexts**.

✓ Districts must also navigate tensions between future-ready skills assessment practices and existing **state** and **national accountability systems**, which traditionally do not include or prioritize measures of future-ready skills.

Recommendations

To move this work forward, several recommendations have emerged for both district leaders and the broader K–12 education field.

District leaders building systems of assessment for future-ready skills should:

- ✓ Clarify their local purpose and goals for future-ready skills assessment and align their assessment system with their instructional vision.
- ✓ Ensure they establish **shared expectations for student performance and development of future-ready skills**. This includes defining skill expectations through rubrics, learning progressions, and “I can” statements that make skills visible and actionable.
- ✓ Build **shared ownership in the system** across educators, students, families, and community members to support a successful implementation.

At the system level, the field should:

- ✓ Invest in **research and development** to create **reliable** and **valid** tools for assessing future-ready skills.
- ✓ **Align recognition systems** across K–12, postsecondary education, and the workforce to ensure that future-ready skills are valued beyond the classroom.
- ✓ **Foster collaborative communities of practice** among district leaders to accelerate innovation by allowing educators to share strategies, address challenges, and build collective capacity for meaningful assessment.



Read more about how districts are developing and measuring students' future-ready skills by downloading our full report, *Portraits in Progress: Emerging Future-Ready Skills Assessment Strategies*.

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