Portraits in Progress: Emerging Future-Ready Skills Assessment Strategies

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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. These 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 in ensuring **reliability and validity**, particularly when developing rubrics and tools that are **comparable** and adaptable to **local contexts**.
- Additionally, districts must 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 are encouraged to:

- **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.

Introduction

To succeed in today's postsecondary environment and workforce, high school graduates need to acquire key future-ready skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity as well as the dispositions to enable life-long learning. We can better prepare students for a life of well-being, fulfillment, and economic security by intentionally designing learning experiences that develop these skills. Classrooms where students are building future-ready skills empower students by fostering agency, curiosity, purpose and connection in their K-12 experiences. To elevate this focus on future-ready skills, many school districts have developed a Portrait of a Graduate. Also called a Profile of a Learner or Life-Ready Graduate, these frameworks define and communicate the skills and competencies that a community believes their students should attain and embody by graduation. The specific skills, competencies, and dispositions each district includes in their Portrait of a Graduate vary across school districts and reflect the unique needs, interests, and context of each community.[1]

While districts might have clear goals for their graduates, educators often lack experience integrating future-ready skills in everyday teaching and learning. The competencies, skills, and dispositions included in Portraits of a Graduate are interdisciplinary, connecting to and showing up in multiple disciplines and content areas. This cross-cutting nature of future-ready skills included in Portraits of a Graduate presents a challenge for district leaders to track if the skills are being intentionally taught and fostered in students across disciplines and grade levels. Future-ready skills included in Portraits of a Graduate are also interconnected, making it hard to tease apart where one skill starts and another ends. For example, collaboration often requires communication, so while they are distinct skills, assessing them independently can be challenging. District leaders are looking for ways to understand how classroom experiences are supporting students to develop each of these skills distinctly and in concert with related skills. Assessing future-ready skills included in Portraits of a Graduate can help district leaders understand how well students are developing these skills. However, in many current systems, future-ready skills are not directly correlated to commonly used assessment methods, grading policies, and learning objectives based on state or national standards. District leaders have articulated a need to better understand how to gather information about students' future-ready skills development, how teachers incorporate these skills in instruction, and the school and system supports that enable and promote students to build these key skills.

To address this challenge, Digital Promise, in partnership with Pearson, reached out to school districts currently implementing or developing assessment practices that measure, analyze, and communicate students' Portrait of a Graduate skill development. We interviewed 16 school districts, each of which was at a different point in their Portrait of a Graduate journey. We then hosted an in-person convening attended by eight school districts from around the country to dive deeply into each district's unique assessment approach (see Appendix A). Participating districts reflected on opportunities and challenges within their approach, engaged in consultancies around shared problems of practice, and co-designed potential future-ready skills assessment solutions. Our driving question was: **What approaches are school districts in the United States leveraging to notice and recognize student growth and development of Portrait of a Graduate skills, competencies, and dispositions?** This report is a summary of our findings on the assessment approaches districts are using to support assessment of their unique Portraits of a Graduate.

1 To learn more about school district Portraits of a Graduate, refer to Appendix A which contains links to Portraits of a Graduate of the districts that contributed to this report.

Our learnings are organized in three sections: Findings, Insights, and Recommendations. In the Findings section, we describe the different methods that districts have used to collect, analyze, and report evidence about student learning. We discuss each approach's relative strengths and challenges and provide illustrative examples from participating school districts. In the Insights section, we look across districts to synthesize shared opportunities and challenges the field is facing in efforts to assess and support development of student Portrait of a Graduate skills. In the concluding section, we provide recommendations for school districts, researchers, policymakers, and content-developers who are designing or implementing assessment of Portrait of a Graduate skills, competencies, and dispositions. Ultimately, we hope this report serves as a resource to educators and leaders to design more meaningful systems of assessment that enable students to gain essential skills for lifelong success and well-being.

Finding: Districts are using a wide variety of methods for assessing student development of Portrait of a Graduate skills

Of the sixteen school districts included in this report, we found a wide variance in how districts are planning for and implementing assessment on future-ready skills named in their Portrait of a Graduate. Overall, there was a common desire to create assessments that aligned with the Portrait of a Graduate goal of creating authentic learning experiences. However, in the seven districts that had a Portrait of a Graduate assessment in place, assessments varied across contexts. In many cases, districts were using multiple approaches to assess student growth related to Portrait of a Graduate skills. Districts may use one type of assessment for yearly data collection and a different type of assessment for ongoing monitoring. Or, districts may use different assessments at the secondary and elementary levels. In some cases assessments were specific to individual schools within a school district. Most district leaders were interested in assessment approaches based on rich, authentic tasks and approaches that could be used to develop student skills and prompt self-evaluation and reflection.

We define assessment as the process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence of student learning in relation to meaningful learning goals. Based on this definition, we organized districts' activities and methods into three components of assessment: (1) collecting evidence of student ability related to Portrait of a Graduate skills, (2) evaluating and analyzing that evidence, and (3) reporting and communicating student growth (Figure 1). The following sections are presented according to these components.

In each section we highlight specific examples from districts we spoke to. These examples are not meant to represent the whole of those districts' work, or an exhaustive list of potential strategies, but rather to provide specificity to each method we are describing. In most cases the highlighted methods represent just one part of a district's assessment approach. In Table 1 we share the methods of collecting, analyzing, and reporting evidence districts are using alongside examples from districts.

Figure 1. District strategies organized by assessment component observed in the landscape scan.

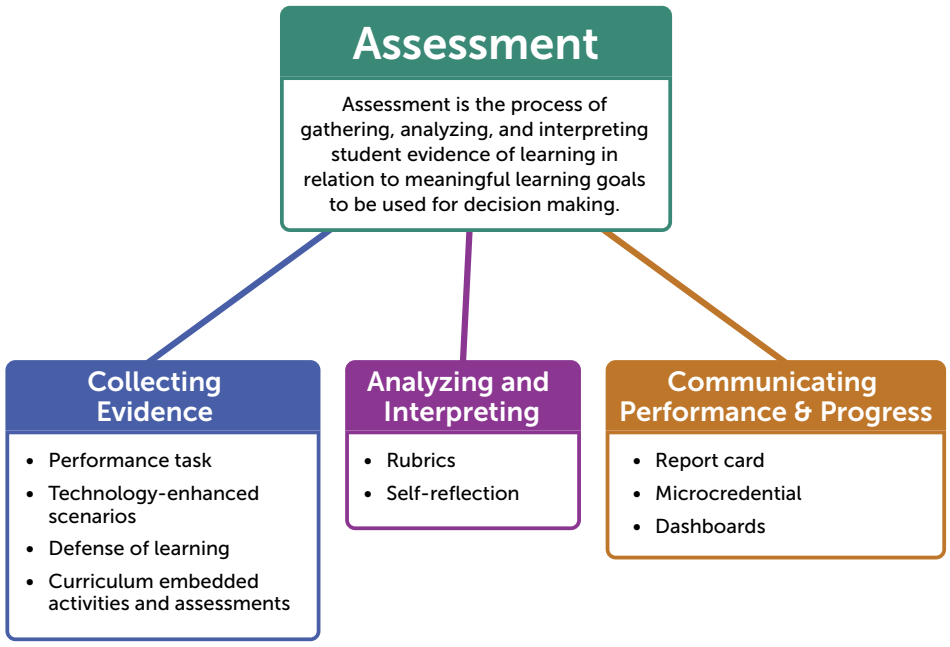


Table 1. District Methods Organized by Assessment Component

Method	Definition	District Example
Methods of collecting evidence of student ability		
Curriculum-embedded classroom activities and assessments	Wide variety of teacher-created, curriculum-embedded activities that allow students to develop and demonstrate Portrait of a Graduate skills.	Ephrata Area School District High School Math example curriculum-embedded classroom activity
Performance tasks	Tasks that require students to demonstrate Portrait of a Graduate skills to create or produce a relevant response or solution (e.g., essay, presentation, proposal, etc.).	Howard-Suamico School District 4th grade social studies performance task
Defenses of learning	Presentation of learning using artifacts to demonstrate and defend readiness for a next step (e.g., promotion, graduation). Students select evidence that demonstrates their Portrait of a Graduate skills and a trained panel provides scores on student proficiency.	Shelby County Public Schools defense of learning expectations
Scenario-based tasks leveraging emerging technology	Interactive scenario- or challenge-based assessments that often leverage AI to provide student feedback and aggregate performance data.	Varies by emerging technology approach
Methods of analyzing and evaluating student performance		
Locally-developed rubrics	Tools defining performance expectations per grade level or grade band; used to evaluate student work and norm on expectations for performance.	North Salem Central School District 5th grade critical & creative thinker self-evaluation rubric
Self-evaluation	Tools or scaffolds that guide students in self-assessment of their Portrait of a Graduate skills.	Example of teacher-designed 3rd-5th grade rubric and self-evaluation tool from Norwalk Public Schools
Methods of reporting and communicating student ability and growth		
Report cards	Integration of scores or holistic evaluations of student performance on Portrait of a Graduate skills in traditional report cards.	Screenshot of sample report card views from Ephrata Area School District
Badging	Certification indicating student performance meets expectations for Portrait of a Graduate skill development.	South Glens Falls Community School District Badge Book
District level dashboards	Web-based platform that presents aggregated and disaggregated data on student Portrait of a Graduate ability.	Shelby County Public Schools district-level dashboard

Collecting evidence of student abilities

A primary purpose of the assessment of future-ready skills is to determine what a student knows and can do in relation to a specific skill in order to support the student's ongoing growth and development of that skill. Determining what a student knows and can do requires gathering evidence of student ability via an intentionally-designed measurement tool. While many validated measures exist to assess core academic content and practices, the assessment of future-ready skills is less evolved. We found that most districts we spoke to use a combination of classroom activities, scenario-based tasks leveraging emerging technologies, performance tasks, and defenses of learning to gather evidence of student ability and growth of future-ready skills found in their Portrait of a Graduate. In this section we describe each method in more detail.

Curriculum-embedded Activities and Assessments

Districts are interested in how teacher-designed assessments, as well as daily learning activities,can serve as assessments of Portrait of a Graduate skills. One district was formally using this approach as part of their assessment system. Others were exploring this option but had not yet created a systematic approach to quantifying scores and feedback on these curriculum-embedded, teacher-designed classroom activities.

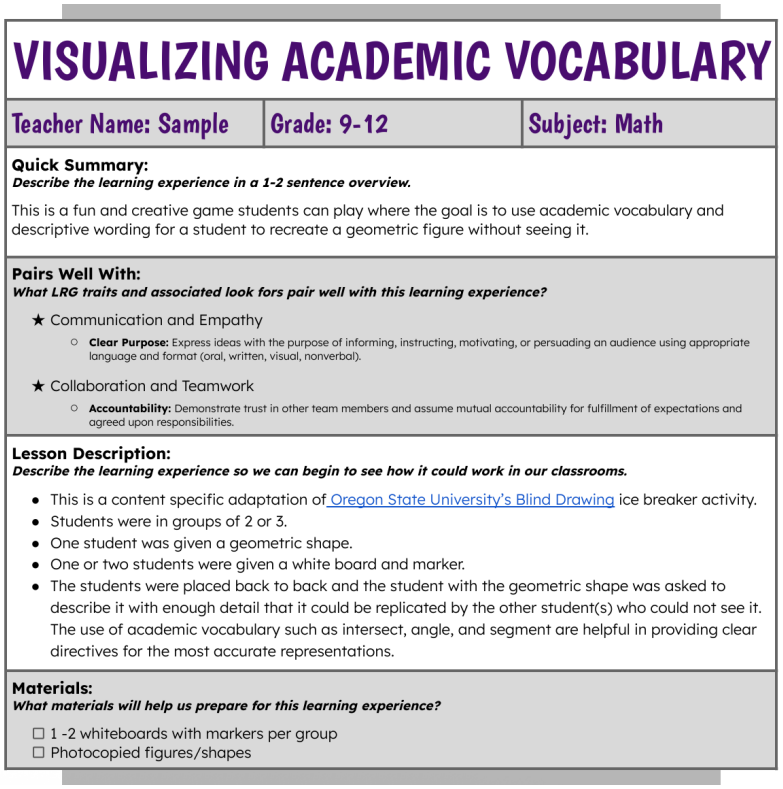
In Action: Teachers in Ephrata Area School District in Pennsylvania develop or select six assignments per marking period that elicit evidence of student skills and dispositions from their Portrait of a Graduate. Teachers use rubrics developed by the school district to evaluate student performance, rating student work as ***recognizing, understanding,*** or ***applying*** the skill or disposition. Teachers enter scores of student performance in the district's student information system.

An advantage of a system that is designed to regularly collect evidence of student performance across content areas is that it provides a breadth of data about student growth and development of Portrait of a Graduate skills. The system in Ephrata captures data and evidence of student performance from a variety of settings and tasks over time. Teachers explained that by providing students frequent opportunities to demonstrate Portrait of a Graduate skills and dispositions, they feel less pressure to inflate scores on specific assignments. Each score represents a student demonstration of a skill in a specific instance, and is not a holistic representation of that student's overall ability. This system may relieve the pressure of evaluating a skill via a single measure, and facilitate more accurate scoring, which ultimately better supports student development of skills. Ephrata is continuing to provide professional development to increase teacher comfort and familiarity with scoring students' demonstrations of their skills and dispositions.

A potential concern of assessing future-ready skills via teacher-designed curriculum-embedded classroom activities is the potential additional workload on teachers. Ephrata has found that by providing ongoing, teacher-centered professional development alongside the requirement to regularly assess student performance on Portrait of a Graduate skills has instead led to increased

willingness of teachers to share strategies and activities to support student growth in these areas. Another potential challenge with this approach is the variability in the types and quality of assignments that teachers may use to assess Portrait of a Graduate skills. While the wide range of assignments used by Ephrata teachers might make it difficult to claim that each scored assignment is individually a valid assessment of Ephrata's Portrait of a Graduate skills and dispositions, in aggregate they provide meaningful and useful data that comprises one portion of Ephrata's overall system of assessment. Ephrata has moved to these frequent assessment points with (1) an emphasis on student growth, and (2) as part of a larger system of Portrait of a Graduate assessment that includes cornerstone projects and a Life Ready Graduate Certificate.

Figure 2. Example of a curriculum-embedded classroom activity that employs communication, empathy, collaboration and teamwork from Ephrata Area School District



VISUALIZING ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

Teacher Name: Sample	Grade: 9-12	Subject: Math

Quick Summary:
Describe the learning experience in a 1-2 sentence overview.

This is a fun and creative game students can play where the goal is to use academic vocabulary and descriptive wording for a student to recreate a geometric figure without seeing it.

Pairs Well With:
What LRG traits and associated look fors pair well with this learning experience?

★ Communication and Empathy
- **Clear Purpose:** Express ideas with the purpose of informing, instructing, motivating, or persuading an audience using appropriate language and format (oral, written, visual, nonverbal).

★ Collaboration and Teamwork
- **Accountability:** Demonstrate trust in other team members and assume mutual accountability for fulfillment of expectations and agreed upon responsibilities.

Lesson Description:
Describe the learning experience so we can begin to see how it could work in our classrooms.

- This is a content specific adaptation of Oregon State University's Blind Drawing ice breaker activity.
- Students were in groups of 2 or 3.
- One student was given a geometric shape.
- One or two students were given a white board and marker.
- The students were placed back to back and the student with the geometric shape was asked to describe it with enough detail that it could be replicated by the other student(s) who could not see it. The use of academic vocabulary such as intersect, angle, and segment are helpful in providing clear directives for the most accurate representations.

Materials:
What materials will help us prepare for this learning experience?

☐ 1 -2 whiteboards with markers per group
☐ Photocopied figures/shapes

Performance Tasks

In four of the school districts we interviewed, at least one form of Portrait of a Graduate assessment was centered around a performance task (e.g., a student-developed response or solution such as an essay, presentation, etc.). These tasks are often embedded in the curriculum, though they may also be stand-alone assessments. Several districts administer performance tasks at specific grade levels as benchmark-like assessments to monitor student performance over time.

In Action: District leaders and teachers from North Salem Central School District in New York developed problem-solving tasks aligned to the curriculum at each grade level. These tasks require students to propose a solution to a content-related problem using the district's problem solving cycle. Teachers have access to the materials needed to implement these tasks as well as rubrics to evaluate student responses.

A benefit of performance tasks district leaders shared is that they can provide rich, complex opportunities for students to demonstrate multiple Portrait of a Graduate skills in one assessment. Performance tasks embedded within the course curriculum allow students to develop and demonstrate their Portrait of a Graduate skills alongside content-specific knowledge. Performance tasks require students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through authentic, integrated products. Another benefit of performance tasks is that district leaders reported that students often find these assessments engaging and meaningful.

A notable challenge of the use of performance tasks is that educators sometimes struggle to score student work consistently and with fidelity across students, classrooms, and schools. District leaders shared that inconsistent scoring practices have decreased their trust in scores as accurate and fair representations of student ability. Additionally, in some instances in which performance tasks are administered outside of the core teaching and learning cycle, sometimes as "one-off" assessments, teachers reported the assessment felt unconnected to daily learning and students did not always fully engage with the task. District leaders interpreted that the tasks can feel like "one more thing" the teachers need to find time to administer.

In Action: Howard-Suamico School District in Wisconsin incorporates performance tasks to assess student growth on Portrait of a Graduate skills. The district provides rubrics, examples, and suggested classroom practices to support implementation of the performance tasks. Figure 3 represents an example of a fourth-grade social studies task.

Figure 3. Howard-Suamico School District performance task

Fourth Grade- Social Studies “ Food Truck Rally” Quarter 4	
Career Pathway	Entrepreneurship
Academic Success Criteria :	SS.Econ1.a.3 Use economic reasoning to compare and contrast the costs and benefits of a decision. Categorize different limited resources (e.g., money, materials, time, labor or workers, land, natural resources, renewable or non-renewable). SS.Econ2.b.4-5 Assess the roles of consumers (demand), producers (supply), prices, non-price factors (e.g., drought or a fad item), and competition in the product market. SS.Econ2.c.3 Compare the skills and knowledge required to produce certain goods and services. Provide an example of the factors of production (i.e., land, labor, capital, entrepreneurship) for a given product.
HSSD Graduate Profile Skills Success Criteria	Collaborator: Students contribute to a group task by sharing ideas and listening and fulfilling roles. Students help the group stay on track toward the goal. Students value different perspectives. Solutionist : Students design a prototype business plan and product Adaptable Students can explain how they adjusted their approach with CEO/panel feedback.
Essential Question:	How can we design a food truck menu that balances community needs, limited resources, and economic sustainability?

Defenses of Learning

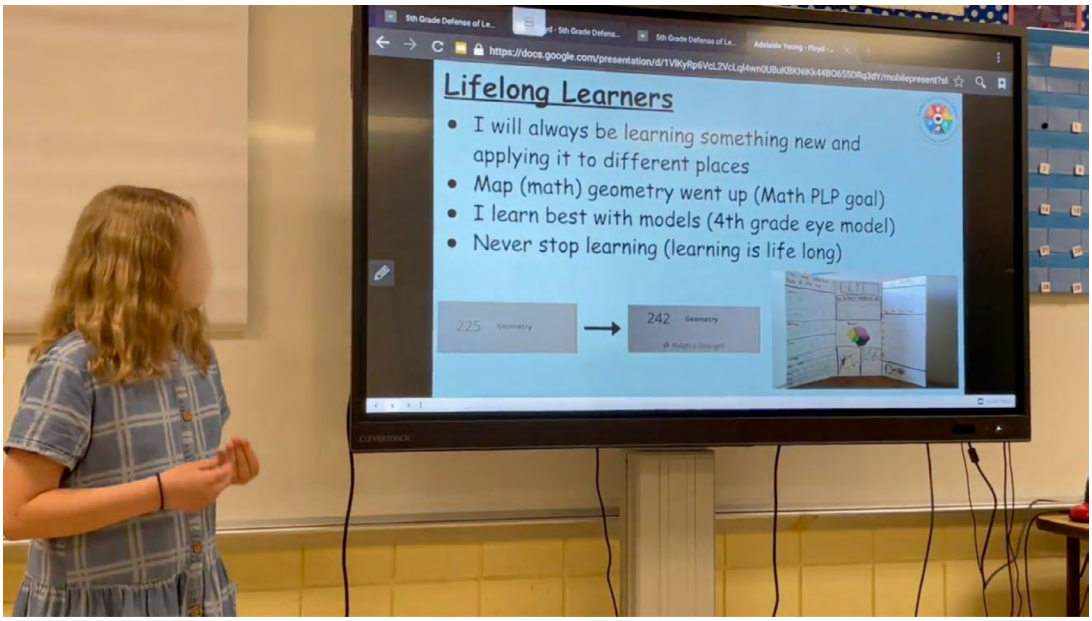
Two districts we interviewed have implemented a student defense of learning as a way to collect and evaluate evidence of student ability and development of Portrait of a Graduate skills. This method leverages student-selected artifacts, presented to a trained panel, as evidence to demonstrate and defend students' proficiency and readiness for a next step, like promotion to the next grade or graduation.

District leaders shared that this approach to collecting and sharing evidence of Portrait of a Graduate skills is a powerful experience for students, teachers, caregivers, and community members alike. It allows students to reflect on their skills and growth in authentic and personalized ways, and has improved connections between educators and the community. Moreover, it can prompt teachers to provide more opportunities for students to develop future-ready skills as a regular part of teaching and learning.

Similar to performance tasks, one challenge with defenses of learning is achieving score reliability. Shelby has taken action to ensure that the feedback and scores students receive are consistent across reviewers and grade levels. Shelby holds calibration sessions where teachers watch a recorded defense of learning from prior years, score the defense, and then discuss their scores and feedback. Based on teacher input during these sessions, along with student suggestions for revisions, Shelby is continually refining their rubrics and scoring process to increase reliability of the scores and feedback provided to students.

In Action: In 5th, 8th, and 12th grades, students of Shelby County Public Schools in Kentucky present a defense of learning to educators and community members. Students collect artifacts or samples of their learning across time and explain how the collection demonstrates they have met a specific level of competency or performance on each of their district's Portrait of a Graduate skills. The defense of learning presentations are evaluated using a rubric that the county revises each year based on rater, student, and teacher feedback. Staff serve as reviewers of the defenses of learning and families and community members attend the defenses of learning to provide feedback to students. Sometimes community members are so impressed with a student's presentations that they offer the student a job on the spot. In Shelby, the defense of learning serves as a graduation requirement for seniors, while also functioning as a lower-stakes activity for students in 5th and 8th grade.

Figure 4. Student presenting during a defense of learning in Shelby County, Kentucky



Scenario-Based Tasks Leveraging Emerging Technologies

Another strategy for gathering data about student development of Portrait of a Graduate skills is the use of stand-alone assessments of skills that leverage emerging technologies. These types of assessments are generally not integrated within the course curriculum and are often designed and developed externally (not by the district or teachers). These assessments are technology-enhanced and may be scenario- or challenge-based and augmented by AI. While only one district we spoke with was planning to pilot this type of assessment, several other districts were interested in the potential of scenario-based tasks that leverage emerging technologies but had not yet identified a tool to use. We have included this method here due to the rapid adoption of emerging technologies in K-12 education.

In Action: One district will pilot an AI-enhanced tool that provides students with a scenario and a series of prompts that ask students to describe, for instance, their problem-solving approach to the scenario. The tool has the ability to capture student responses through video (recording voice, expression, and gesture as students respond to prompts) or text in multiple languages for accessibility. Using natural language processing, the tool can analyze student responses and uses machine learning to compare those responses to rubrics of future-ready skills aligned to those in the district's Portrait of a Graduate. The AI-assisted tool is then able to provide feedback to students about their future-ready skills, based on the evidence in their responses. Students would not receive an individual score for this activity, but the district would be able to collect information about aggregate scores across a grade level and school. By piloting this assessment tool, the district will be able to collect baseline data about the current level of student ability on each of their Portrait of a Graduate skills. This school district is especially interested in learning how students respond to the tool.

A potential benefit of an AI-assisted scenario-based assessment is its ability to provide each student with rich and meaningful feedback about their performance. Because an AI-assisted tool can be trained on a district's Portrait of a Graduate learning progressions, the tool can give specific, personalized feedback to each student that is aligned with the future-ready skills identified by the community and the school district. This ability to give specific feedback to each student could free up the teacher to focus on other tasks such as conferencing with students or providing small-group tutoring in identified areas of need.

Because AI-assisted scenario-based assessments are relatively untested, there is some concern about how well they can provide accurate and personalized feedback; this district plans to carefully monitor the impact of the use of their AI-assisted tool on students. Tools that use emerging technology should always be carefully reviewed for safety, including privacy and fairness. Student data needs to be protected and guarded against unauthorized access. Additionally, humans (such as teachers or students) should have opportunities to override an AI-based decision or output. Another potential concern with these scenario-based tasks is that they may not be connected to course content, which could reduce learners' ability to apply these skills in new contexts.

Evaluating and analyzing student performance

Based on interviews and convening presentations, we found that districts are using two main methods to evaluate and analyze student performance on future-ready skills assessments: rubrics and student self-evaluations. Each of these methods allow districts to articulate unique, local expectations for performance as well a progression of development of each skill; the central focus is on growth. In this section we will expand on each of these methods.

Locally-developed Rubrics

Of the seven districts with assessments in place, all are using locally developed, grade-banded rubrics to evaluate student evidence and demonstration of Portrait of a Graduate skills. Whether students are producing performance tasks, presenting defenses of learning, or engaging in classroom activities, districts use rubrics to provide scores and feedback. Rubrics identify the outcomes and evidence that represent specific levels of student performance on each Portrait of a Graduate skill. In most cases, rubrics were developed at the district level with input from educators. In a few cases, students and community members reviewed and provided feedback on rubrics. After their development, district leaders worked with school leaders and instructional coaches to ensure teachers were familiar with the district rubrics.

NORWALK Public Schools

In Action: Norwalk Public Schools released their Portrait of a Graduate in 2024 and have prioritized developing assessments for critical thinking. In the 2024-2025 school year, a cohort of nine teachers co-designed assessment tools for their classroom. Using the learning progression developed by district leaders, teachers created a rubric to evaluate student projects and presentations.

One strength of locally-developed rubrics is that they are representative of each district's unique context and goals. Districts often develop their rubrics based on child development and educational research related to future-ready skill development, in concert with local definitions of their Portrait of a Graduate skills and competencies. Involving students, staff, and community members in the development of rubrics has helped establish a shared understanding of Portrait of a Graduate skills and performance indicators.

A challenge with using locally-developed rubrics is the potential for wide variability in teachers' scores. Many districts address this reliability issue by holding calibration sessions in which groups of educators review and collectively score student work samples. Key to this process is discussing and unpacking different interpretations and applications of rubric score levels.

Figure 5: Norwalk Public Schools 3rd-5th grade critical thinker rubric

Teacher Facing Rubric

Critical Thinking Skill	Beginning (Exploring)	Emerging (Building)	Developing (Advancing)	Demonstrating (Mastering)
Interpret (Understands and explains meaning, patterns, or perspectives)	Recognizes key details and can restate information in own words.	Begins to describe main ideas and patterns, offering basic explanations.	Explains ideas with supporting details, recognizing different perspectives.	Provides deep explanations, drawing insightful conclusions and recognizing multiple viewpoints.
Analyze (Breaks down information into parts to understand relationships)	Identifies basic details and recognizes simple connections between ideas.	Begins to explain relationships between ideas using evidence.	Organizes information logically and makes connections using clear reasoning.	Thoroughly examines information, identifying complex relationships and supporting ideas with strong evidence.
Synthesize/Apply (Combines information from different sources to create new ideas or solutions and understands how solutions can be replicated in different settings)	Lists ideas from provided sources and uses some information to defend a stance or complete a task.	Identifies information from multiple provided sources and combines some learning to defend a stance or complete a task.	Combines important information from multiple provided or self-selected sources to defend a stance or complete a task.	Identifies multiple relevant sources and combines new learning to develop and defend a stance, develop solutions to complete a task, and explain how solutions can be applied to different circumstances.
Evaluate (Judges the quality, credibility, or significance of information)	Shares opinions based on personal experience or familiar examples.	Begins to use evidence to explain why an idea or source is useful or important.	Uses criteria to judge the reliability or impact of ideas and supports claims with reasoning.	Develops and uses criteria to thoughtfully judge information, considering multiple factors and justifying judgments with strong evidence.
Reflects & Revises (Understands the quality of work and actively uses feedback to improve solutions)	Recognizes feedback as a means of improving work. Reiterates feedback given.	Recognizes feedback as a means of improving work. Reiterates feedback given. Returns to work and makes minor improvements.	Understands the important role of feedback to improve work and ideas. Reiterates feedback given. Uses feedback to make some valuable improvements.	Understands the important role of feedback to improve work and ideas. Explains how feedback is incorporated into revisions. Uses evidence to support reflections and revisions.
	3rd Expectation	4th Expectation	5th Expectation	

Student Self-Evaluation

One way in which districts ensure that Portrait of a Graduate evaluation remains personal and growth-oriented is by including self-evaluation as a part of their system of Portrait of a Graduate assessment. Five of the seven districts that had assessments of student performance on Portrait of a Graduate skills in place were explicitly integrating student self-evaluation into their assessment practices.

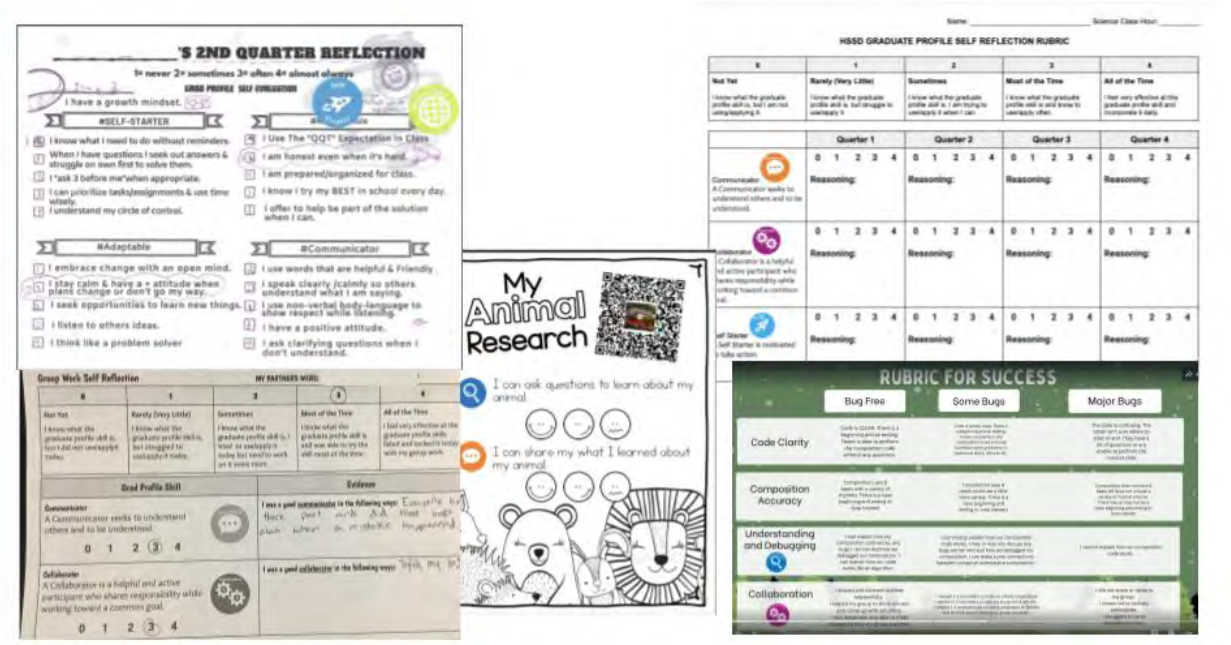
HOWARD-SUAMICO SCHOOL DISTRICT

In Action: Howard-Suamico School District in Wisconsin works with teachers to provide frequent, ongoing opportunities for students to evaluate their future-ready skills and abilities. Among other assessment strategies, teachers use self-evaluation tools to encourage students to reflect on their areas of strength and growth. For instance, graphic organizers provide students opportunities to notice with specificity how, where, and when they demonstrate future-ready skills, and are aligned with Howard-Suamico's learning progressions.

A benefit of frequent self-evaluation is that it compels students to unpack each Portrait of a Graduate skill and better understand expectations for their performance. Many Portraits of a Graduate specifically name the development of student metacognition, thinking about one's thinking and learning processes, as a goal. Using self-evaluation provides an important process for students to build their metacognitive skills.

One concern with this approach is ensuring teachers do not over-rely on student self-evaluation, but also incorporate other methods of assessment. District leaders expressed that receiving and reflecting on external and expert feedback—from teachers, peers, and community members—is essential for students to know how and in what ways they can continue to develop their future-ready skills.

Figure 6. Examples of teacher-designed student self-evaluation tools used in Howard-Suamico, Wisconsin



Reporting and communicating student performance

The interviews and district presentations indicated that districts are using three main methods to report and communicate student performance and growth of future-ready skills in their Portrait of a Graduate: report cards, badging, and district dashboards. Each of these methods serve a distinct purpose and reflect a district's need to consider multiple audiences when sharing assessment results. In this section we will discuss each of these methods.

Report Cards

Districts primarily aim to reach students and their caregivers, who each want to understand student growth and progress on the development of future-ready skills. Two districts that we spoke with have addressed this goal by including Portrait of a Graduate skills scores in traditional report cards.

A benefit of using report cards to report and communicate student ability is that students, families, and staff are all familiar with this format. This approach allows districts to leverage an existing system and it avoids the pitfall of adding an additional platform or tool for caregivers, students, and staff to learn.

A challenge with this reporting method is ensuring that students and caregivers understand the meaning surrounding the specific scores and skills that appear on the report card. Communicating the context of these scores through narrative reports can be an effective way to address this concern.

In Action: Each marking period, students in Ephrata Area School District receive multiple scores tied to assessments of Ephrata's Portrait of a Graduate skills and dispositions on their report cards. Each teacher provides six scores on student demonstration of Portrait of a Graduate skills. The average of the two most recent scores is reported on report cards each marking period and students, parents, and staff can view student's historical scores as well. District-level, aggregate data of students' skills can be viewed by district leaders to help inform decision-making regarding professional development.

Badging

Three districts we spoke with are experimenting with badging as a means of communicating student achievement related to Portrait of a Graduate skills. Badges are visuals that represent specific skills and are awarded when students have demonstrated proficiency. Badges can be awarded physically, in a booklet or on a bulletin board, or digitally, using a learning management system or electronic portfolio.

Districts that use this approach report that it generates significant interest and excitement from students. Earning badges inspires students and the system provides teachers with opportunities to celebrate students' strengths and growth. Schools that use standards-based grading find this system of reporting student performance is familiar to teachers, students, and caregivers.

Badging systems have some of the same challenges as other methods of evaluating and communicating student performance on future-ready skills. Without valid measures and strong systems, badges may not be awarded consistently and comparably across students and skills. Furthermore, badging systems need to

include a process by which students receive an explanation of why they did or did not earn a badge, as well as feedback that can support their continued growth. Badging is best used as part of a wider system of assessment with careful thought to collecting student evidence and evaluating that evidence.

In Action: In South Glens Falls, students earn a badge when they demonstrate one of the district's Portrait of a Graduate skills. Students each have a physical Badge Book where they collect their badges in the form of stickers. Included in the Badge Book are "I can..." statements for each skill, which supports student understanding of the skill and associated behaviors and actions. Badges are awarded by teachers as well as principals and district leaders using the district-level criteria as exhibited in the "I can..." statements.

Figure 7. South Glens Falls School District (NY) Badge Book and I Can statements

K-2 Portrait of a Learner: What it Means to Be a Bulldog!	
Adaptable Problem Solver	
	I can try a new way if my idea doesn't work.
	I can think of different ways to solve a problem.
	I keep trying, even when it's hard.
Collaborative Learner	
	I can work and play nicely with others.
	I can listen to the opinions of others.
	I can be kind and take turns.
Critical Thinker	
	I can ask questions when I'm curious.
	I can try to figure things out on my own.
	I can learn from my mistakes.
Creative Innovator	
	I can try different ways to solve a problem.
	I can use my imagination to try new things.
	I can make connections in my learning.
Empathetic Influencer	
	I can use kind words and actions.
	I can wait and listen when others are talking.
	I can be kind, even when I feel upset.
Responsible Citizen	
	I can follow the rules at school.
	I can finish my work and stay on task.
	I can admit when I make a mistake.

Dashboards

Districts we spoke with are also interested in, developing, or implementing dashboards that allow teachers, school leaders, and/or district leaders to view student Portrait of a Graduate skills scores across schools and at the aggregate district level. Two districts we spoke to have a dashboard in place. Four districts have dashboard tools they are experimenting with or use for other assessments and are determining how to use these as part of their Portrait of a Graduate. District leaders report that these dashboards inform their understanding of how students are performing related to their districts' Portrait of a Graduate skills.

In Action: Shelby County Public Schools developed a district dashboard that aggregates student data on their defenses of learning by grade level, school, and demographic. District leaders use the dashboard to support decision-making about professional learning needs and resource development. Shelby provides a public link to their district dashboard, making the data accessible and visible to caregivers, business leaders, and community members.

District dashboards can help district leaders within and across grade levels, classrooms, and schools. District and school level data can then be used to inform professional development and coaching focus areas and priorities. Furthermore, district leaders are often required to share data regarding student outcomes with school boards and other stakeholders; dashboards provide aggregate data that can meet this and other needs. In addition, most dashboards have visualizing and data sharing capabilities that support educators and district leaders in interpreting data to support ongoing student development of Portrait of a Graduate skills via instructional shifts, targeted supports, and other strategies.

A challenge related to developing and maintaining dashboards is the technical skills and resources required to either build a functioning tool or partner with a platform that is willing to customize their system to align with the district's needs. Dashboards that operate by syncing data from multiple sources (e.g., student information systems, learning management systems, etc.) relieve district personnel from inputting Portrait of a Graduate data but need to be monitored and maintained to ensure data is accurate. Finally, student data and privacy must be maintained while providing transparency of data.

Figure 8. Example of district dashboard aggregating student defense of learning scores

Insights

Five key insights have emerged from our interviews and convening with district leaders. In addition to the variation among methods districts are using to collect evidence, evaluate, and communicate student performance on future-ready skills, we identified the following cross-cutting themes.

A. Districts have multiple, interrelated goals that impact their assessment process.

Districts designed and implemented Portrait of a Graduate assessments that relate to their district strategy, Portrait of a Graduate vision, and aligned approach to teaching and learning. Every district leader we talked to was thinking about how to ensure that the Portrait of a Graduate isn't just something that hangs on the wall, but, instead, serves as a true representation of the district's goals and values, and a guiding framework for daily teaching and learning. While they may have initially developed Portraits of a Graduate to articulate a commitment to student-centered learning practices anchored in the development of future-ready skills, the objective of districts' Portrait of a Graduate assessment often extends beyond measuring individual learners' skills. Frequently, these assessments aim to understand the extent to which future-ready skills are embedded in instruction and reflect teacher practice. In many cases, assessments are aggregated and used to report out to the Board of Education or the local community about the impact of the Portrait of a Graduate initiative. The vision and purpose for districts' Portrait of a Graduate initiatives determine which of the following approaches their assessment system emphasize:

- **Understand student ability.** Most districts are interested in what students know and can do in relation to Portrait of a Graduate skills and competencies, although this is often not their singular objective. The approaches in the previous section detail how districts collect evidence, evaluate, and report on student ability. In addition to understanding students' current ability, districts use assessment to gauge student progress and growth over time.
- **Understand classroom practices.** In addition to understanding what students know and can do in relation to Portrait of a Graduate skills, districts were also interested in understanding the extent to which teachers are designing and implementing learning experiences that enable students to practice and demonstrate Portrait of a Graduate skills. During our convening, several districts shared look-for documents that supported classroom observation protocols by describing students and teacher behaviors that might be observed that relate to the development of future-ready skills. While not the focus of this report, districts also expressed interest in assessing the opportunities students were getting to develop future-ready skills.
- **Communicate to the community.** Districts developed their Portrait of a Graduate alongside their communities and value keeping their communities informed on how they are bringing the Portrait of a Graduate to life and the impact it's having on their schools and students. For instance, Shelby County Public Schools developed a public facing website that includes defense of learning examples, visualizations of school-level scores from defenses of learning, and narratives of individual stories of the impact of their Portrait of a Graduate.
- **Evaluate Implementation.** District leaders are also interested in a way to step back and understand the overall impact of their Portrait of a Graduate. One goal of assessment district leaders shared was

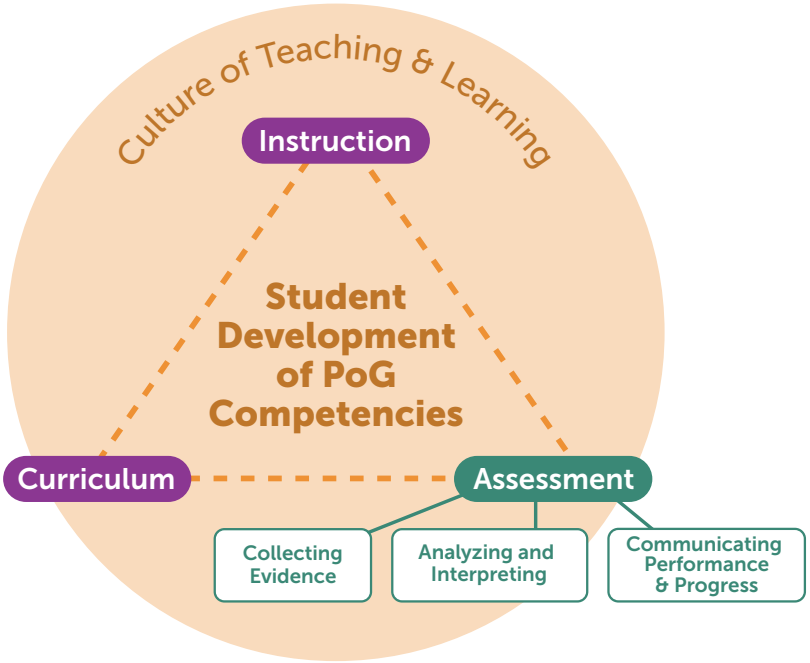
to determine strengths and weaknesses of their Portrait of a Graduate and to continuously improve their processes. Some methods that districts use to conduct program evaluations include staff, parent, and student surveys and focus groups to support their understanding of how the Portrait of a Graduate was being understood and incorporated into daily teaching and learning.

B. Future-ready skills assessments are interconnected with curriculum and instruction.

Portraits of a Graduate are about more than assessment; they are about nurturing and developing students with skills they need for success in school and in life. Assessment is one piece of each district's overall Portrait of a Graduate implementation – deeply and inextricably linked to instruction, curriculum, and the larger culture of teaching and learning in their school system.

Embedding assessments within a system of teaching and learning is critical for developing ownership and buy-in for implementation. As one district leader shared, "We want educators to see that the Portrait isn't just one more new thing, it is the thing." All of the districts we interviewed have done deep and robust work developing their Portraits of a Graduate in concert with students, staff, and community in order to intentionally capture the skills, competencies, and dispositions they want their student to develop throughout their K-12 educational experiences.

Figure 9. How Portrait of a Graduate Assessments are situated within systems of Curriculum, Instruction and Culture



Assessing future-ready skills has implications for curriculum, instruction, and the larger teaching and learning culture of a school system (Figure 9). If students are completing assessments of future-ready skills — whether creating a portfolio, completing a performance task, or preparing a defense of learning—the introduction of that assessment will impact curriculum and instruction. How will curriculum and instruction shift in order to support student development of future-ready skills? What instructional strategies can be leveraged to provide students opportunities to practice their skills? How are future-ready skills embedded within the curriculum of core academic classes? How are the assessments tied to the curriculum and activities within classes?

While assessments can serve as an impetus to promote specific teaching and learning practices, without alignment across the full system of teaching and learning, assessments alone will not lead to the desired student outcomes. Districts we spoke to reported investing significantly in aligning materials and instructional practices with Portrait of a Graduate skills to create a cohesive system.

C. Districts desire student-centered assessments that promote ongoing growth and development of future-ready skills.

District leaders, school administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers believe deeply in the power of the Portrait of a Graduate to develop the whole-child. There is a strong desire among school districts to develop assessments that assist students with developing Portrait of a Graduate skills via opportunities to: recognize their growth, receive specific, actionable feedback, and self-reflect on their progress on developing Portrait of a Graduate skills.

Growth over time: Districts shared that they had more success with future-ready skill assessment when they focused on student growth rather than student proficiency. For example, leaders from Shelby shared that one student's defense of learning ended with her parent in tears as she emphasized how significantly the student had grown as a result of the district's focus on future-ready skills. The process Shelby has in place, which allows students, educators, and family members to notice and celebrate this growth, reinforced the meaning of their Portrait of a Graduate. In Ephrata, the inclusion of multiple instances of reporting on student performance on their Portrait of a Graduate skills and dispositions has created important opportunities to reflect about how students have grown over the course of a school year. This system allows for individual students to see their growth via the scores on their report cards and also for the system to see growth as the student information system aggregates the growth data across students.

Provide feedback: One way to ensure that students have opportunities to grow and develop future-ready skills is to use assessments that provide specific, actionable feedback to students. Personalized feedback and recommendations for improvement strengthen students' abilities to develop their skills, particularly when paired with other opportunities to practice and demonstrate that skill. Additionally, feedback from teachers, peers, caregivers, and community members can substantiate students' self-evaluations and deepen their reflections. Educators need support to provide feedback that is aligned to skill expectations and promotes growth. Many teachers have not been explicitly taught how to provide such feedback, nor how to teach and incorporate future-ready skills in their instruction. Districts sought ways to help teachers develop feedback systems and protocols that promote student growth and lifelong learning.

Self-evaluation: Districts also emphasized the need to provide students with the opportunity and guidance to evaluate and reflect on their skills. Classroom teachers and district leaders alike valued providing opportunities for students to analyze their own thinking, recognizing that this metacognitive skill was also often part of the larger set of skills they were looking to develop in students as part of their Portrait of a Graduate. In addition to providing an opportunity for self-evaluation, these prompts allow teachers to gain student perspective on these very personalized skills.

D. Districts face obstacles implementing authentic and customizable assessments in a valid and reliable way.

Districts that have Portrait of a Graduate assessments in place expressed a need for guidance, systems, and processes to support the technical quality of the assessment tools they create.

Districts need to ensure that any data captured in dashboards is valid, that is, actually measuring what they intended to measure. One district shared an example of using a measure that defined skills differently than they did, leading to results that did not actually represent student ability related to the district's meaning of

the skill. Relatedly, many districts use staff and student survey data to collect information about Portrait of a Graduate skills. While it is important to reach out to these audiences to understand their opinions, this data is self-reported rather than evidence-based and may not have a high level of validity.

As described above, some districts have found that teachers were evaluating student performance on Portrait of a Graduate skills differently, even when using the same rubric. It's important to consider score reliability to ensure that scores represent student ability rather than a difference in how student performance is evaluated.

Finally, most districts we talked to used their own rubrics to assess Portrait of a Graduate skills. These locally-designed rubrics are all slightly different from one another, which limits the comparability of scores across districts, making it difficult for districts to get a sense of how their students are performing compared to students elsewhere in other states or districts.

This reality presents an important tension in districts' goals related to the assessment of future-ready skills: districts value the ability to create unique and localized skill constructs, measures, and tools, yet also desire comparability and validity. This tension can be overcome, but requires additional research and development.

E. Districts struggle to balance their emphasis on future-ready skills with state and national reporting requirements.

Measuring student growth and ability on future-ready skills is not just situated within the teaching and learning culture of the school system, but it is also situated within a larger, national system of assessment. As districts consider their Portrait of a Graduate assessment approach, they are always mindful of how their approach to assessing future-ready skills is aligned, or disconnected from, the needs and interests of state boards of education, federal policies, and college admission processes. Districts often reported feeling a tension between recognizing and celebrating student growth on these important and desired skills with administering required assessments such as national standardized tests, required state exams, and college admissions expectations. Ideally, federal, state, and local systems need to point in the same direction, towards students' lifelong success and well-being.

In some cases, innovative state policies support how districts were designing and utilizing future-ready skills assessments. For instance, in Kentucky, the shift to local accountability measures in alignment with the state Portrait of a Graduate has allowed Shelby to pursue their defenses of learning as a part of their state accountability measures. A district leader from Shelby shared, "[it] on our district's end because we are seeing that it [Portrait of a Graduate defenses of learning] can be used as a valid assessment tool if the state gives us an additional component for local accountability." Shelby is well-positioned to serve as a model for how Kentucky policy can be leveraged to celebrate student growth on future-ready skills. Ephrata is currently in the process of requesting their Life-Ready Graduate be recognized by the state of Pennsylvania and has served as a leader to other districts as they develop similar programs. The two districts from New York state who attended our convening will be carefully watching New York's emerging policies related to new, state-wide Portrait of a Graduate to see how their local Portraits of a Graduate will be impacted by state legislation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to be used by districts who have created a Portrait of a Graduate and aim to design an aligned assessment system. The recommendations stem from the findings and insights of this report.

District Leader Recommendations

1. Be clear about what you want to learn and do with your assessment system.

Assessment systems should be designed to gather the data required for the claims a district aims to make, whether those claims are about student skill development, opportunities to learn, system support, or other potential goals. Without a firmly-established vision and a consideration of the connection of the assessment to curriculum and instruction, the assessment loses value. Before you design your assessment system, ensure your district has clear goals and alignment on the purpose of your assessment.

In general, districts should consider three different but interrelated questions:

1. **Why** do you want to assess future-ready skills? What do you hope to achieve?
2. **What** data would support your assessment goal?
3. **How** might an assessment elicit the necessary data and evidence? What measure is required?

Aligning on a clear purpose for assessment is necessary to produce the data a district is looking for to meet its goals.

2. Define and norm on descriptions, expectations, and outcomes for each skill.

Vital to any system of teaching and learning that includes future-ready skills is a common understanding among educators and students of what each skill is, how each skill is developed and demonstrated, and specific expectations for performance. This shared understanding is essential for assessment; teachers and students can not accurately assess— much less provide specific, actionable feedback to students on—skills and expectations that are unclear. The process of collaboratively unpacking, interrogating, and discussing each skill is itself a learning experience that supports deeper understanding of the skill.

We recommend the following:

- **Clearly articulate the meaning of each future-ready skill in your Portrait of a Graduate.**

  Future-ready skills are complex, interdependent, and can be developed and demonstrated in many different ways. Terms like critical thinking or creative thinking describe a wide range of practices, behaviors, abilities, and outcomes. Districts should consider what they want students to be able to know and do in relation to each skill and what it would look like for a student to embody each skill. Being specific about what your district means is essential to ensuring that skill development can be incorporated into teaching and learning, including assessment.

- **Develop rubrics, learning progressions, "I can" statements, and/or classroom "Look Fors" to clarify and communicate expectations for each future-ready skill.**

  After defining and clarifying the meaning of each skill, consider your expectations for performance. Many districts we spoke with accomplished this by creating rubrics and aligned learning

progressions that outline specific outcomes, behaviors, or actions that students might demonstrate at each grade band or level. It is essential that students have access to these tools and understand how they are integrated within their learning.

- **Regularly examine student work and calibrate on student performance.**

  It is important to norm on the expectations identified in rubrics and learning progressions in order to provide reliable scores, consistent and actionable feedback, and ensure that students know how to succeed. To improve scoring consistency and to build capacity in educators and leaders, districts have engaged in artifact analysis processes. Educators bring samples of student work and, in small collaborative groups, participants discuss evidence of future-ready skills within the work and seek consensus on a score, using the tools and frameworks that articulate expectations.

3. Focus on asset-based practices that support student learning and development.

Assessments of future-ready skills and Portrait of a Graduate assessment systems should be designed to provide all students with opportunities to demonstrate what they can do, rather than focus on what they can't yet do. Assessments should be engaging and relevant to students, and embedded within existing learning (or outside of school life). Importantly, assessment results should empower students to further their learning and development. Many districts discussed educators' uneasiness with scoring students' abilities on future-ready skills. This hesitancy represents both concern about the impact isolated scores might have on students' self-perception about their abilities and apprehension that a single measure could fully, fairly, or consistently capture student ability. Ensuring that future-ready skills assessments are designed to emphasize student growth over time, opportunities for students to self-reflect, and the inclusion of specific, actionable feedback can help to overcome this tension.

We recommend the following:

- **Design your assessment system to support individual student growth over time.**

  Future-ready skills are practiced and nurtured over a lifetime and are never truly "mastered." Therefore, the predominant focus of assessment should be on growth rather than reaching a specific level of "mastery" or "proficiency." Portrait of a Graduate assessments should not be "one and done," they should instead offer an opportunity to notice how students are progressing and then provide feedback that students can use to further strengthen Portrait of a Graduate. The underlying premise of Portrait of a Graduate efforts is to foster the development of Portrait of a Graduate skills that support whole-child development. Assessment systems should allow for celebration of students' journeys deepening and strengthening their personal progress.

- **Use assessments that provide specific, actionable feedback for students.**

  Assessment results—in concert with related assessment tools (e.g., rubrics, scoring criteria, etc.)—should communicate to students their current strengths and areas of growth, as well as how they can continue to grow and develop their skills. Personalized feedback and recommendations for improvement will strengthen students' abilities to develop their skills, particularly when paired with another opportunity to practice and demonstrate that skill. Employing resources and tools that can assist teachers with giving actionable feedback will strengthen Portrait of a Graduate assessment.

- **Design assessments that foster student ownership and self-evaluation of their learning.**

  Enabling students to recognize and reflect on their own growth on future-ready skills should be a priority. Share rubrics and learning progressions with students so that they can evaluate their own progress and set individual goals. Building these metacognitive skills will provide lasting habits for life-long learning.

4. Build ownership in your Portrait of a Graduate to foster ownership in your assessment approach.

A successful approach to assessing future-ready skills requires buy-in and commitment to the vision of the Portrait of a Graduate throughout the entire school system and community. It can be difficult to make sure the Portrait of a Graduate is a central, unifying vision in a school system amidst the multitude of initiatives and unexpected demands that a school district faces.

We recommend the following:

- **Ensure consistent communications, while leaving room for school-level flexibility.**

  This is sometimes called a tight/loose approach. District leaders need to provide clarity, guidance, support, and tools to unpack expectations and strategies for implementation of future-ready skills assessments. These guidelines should be clear and well-communicated (i.e., tight). Schools and teachers should then have the ability to find their ideal ways to make these expectations a part of daily teaching and learning (i.e., loose). Leadership needs to provide the vision and support to reach the vision, while allowing flexibility.

- **Use feedback loops to involve stakeholders in the Portrait of a Graduate implementation process.**

  Yearly surveys, focus groups, or design sessions with students, staff, and community members give a voice to all those that are involved in a Portrait of a Graduate and accompanying assessment system. Providing opportunities for feedback and iteration allow district leaders to to understand how assessments are being used in the classroom, and their impacts on educators and students. These feedback loops will also create shared ownership for the Portrait of a Graduate, building an aligned vision of its purpose and vision.

Recommendations for the K-12 Education Field

The following recommendations are for the larger K-12 education field including researchers, content developers, policymakers, and thought leaders. These recommendations are based on the interviews and convening presentations that were the basis for this report.

1. Invest in research and development to advance valid and reliable future-ready assessments.

All of the district leaders we spoke to are interested in implementing future-ready skills assessments that are robust, reliable, and relevant for the culture of teaching and learning in their unique school systems and communities. As such, each district designed and developed their own system of assessment. We identified the following district needs to support high-quality assessment of Portrait of a Graduate skills:

- Research that examines the reliability and validity of the locally-relevant tools districts are using.
- Systems and processes to iterate and improve upon the validity and reliability of the tools they have developed while maintaining local flexibility relevance.
- Development of high-quality assessments available for districts to adapt to their contexts.

Each of these next steps is essential for the continuity of this work. A focus on future-ready skills has the potential to shift K-12 education towards engaging, empowering, and enriching educational experiences. The design and development of a reliable assessment of student performance is a critical enabling element of that shift.

2. Align K-12 and postsecondary systems to value and recognize students' future-ready skills.

As indicated in our findings, districts often feel pulled in different directions by the competing priorities of national and state assessment requirements and local Portrait of a Graduate systems focused on future-ready skills. As more districts and states adopt Portraits of a Graduate, policymakers and educational leaders need to find ways to align current systems of accountability and recognition to encompass and promote future-ready skill development. For example, some existing assessments from districts or states focus on a narrow set of outcomes that do not explicitly value future-ready skills.

Interoperability and recognition of Portrait of Graduate assessments with state, workforce, and postsecondary institutions would allow for districts to more strategically and effectively assess student future-ready skills.

- Interoperability. There is a need to design assessment systems that align district Portrait of a Graduate priorities with state and local accountability measures.
- Recognition. Collaboration among workplaces, postsecondary institutions, external partners, and districts could lead to credentialing and formal recognition of student proficiency on future-ready skills that would be widely accepted and acknowledged in ways that create postsecondary opportunities for students. For example, students that demonstrate evidence of specific desired skills might be prioritized for a job interview or internship, or might earn college credit.

Postsecondary institutions and workplace leaders want students and employees with strong future-ready skills; we must develop systems in which future-ready skills are prioritized student outcomes.

3. Provide systems of support for districts that are engaged in this work.

Districts have made considerable progress on this new and emerging field of assessing future-ready skills. To support this continued work, there is incredible value in collaboration amongst district leaders as they set out to design and develop future-ready skills assessments. Researchers, thought-leaders, and state and country institutions can support this collaboration through communities of practice, collaborative design, and dissemination of promising approaches. Communities of practice, in which district leaders regularly meet and share problems of practice related to future-ready skills assessment, can break down silos and can help to develop the robust, reliable, and relevant systems of assessment districts are looking for. While each Portrait of a Graduate is unique to the community that designed it, there are significant similarities among districts' visions and goals, making the topic ripe for collaborative ideation, design, and iteration. Additionally, there is a lot of good work being done locally that should be elevated and shared with the field. External partners are needed to broker relationships among district leaders and facilitate these communities of practice.

Conclusion

School districts adopt Portrait of a Graduate initiatives to integrate future-ready skills into teaching and learning so that, ultimately, learners are prepared to lead successful lives. Districts must simultaneously gather information about: how well students are developing the skills, how teachers are incorporating skill development in instruction, and how the school and system support, enable, and promote student development of these key skills.

While the methods and tools to capture students' Portrait of a Graduate progress varies between districts, we found that districts are all looking to provide meaningful assessments that promote student growth in a reliable way. At the same time, they are looking for meaningful assessment connected to teaching and learning and broader systems of value and recognition in the workforce and postsecondary education.

Districts can design and implement meaningful assessments for Portraits of a Graduate by aligning on a purpose, norming on competencies, prioritizing student growth, and building ownership. The field can support districts to design these assessments by supporting research and development to promote validity and reliability in measures, design systems that value and recognize future ready skills in education and beyond, and create systems of support for districts to share with and learn from each other. These actions will support the Portrait of a Graduate initiatives to transform teaching and learning to align to its ultimate purpose:providing more authentic, meaningful, and systematic learning experiences for students to gain essential skills for lifelong success and well-being.

Appendix A

Figure 1. Districts that attended Assessing Our Portraits Convening

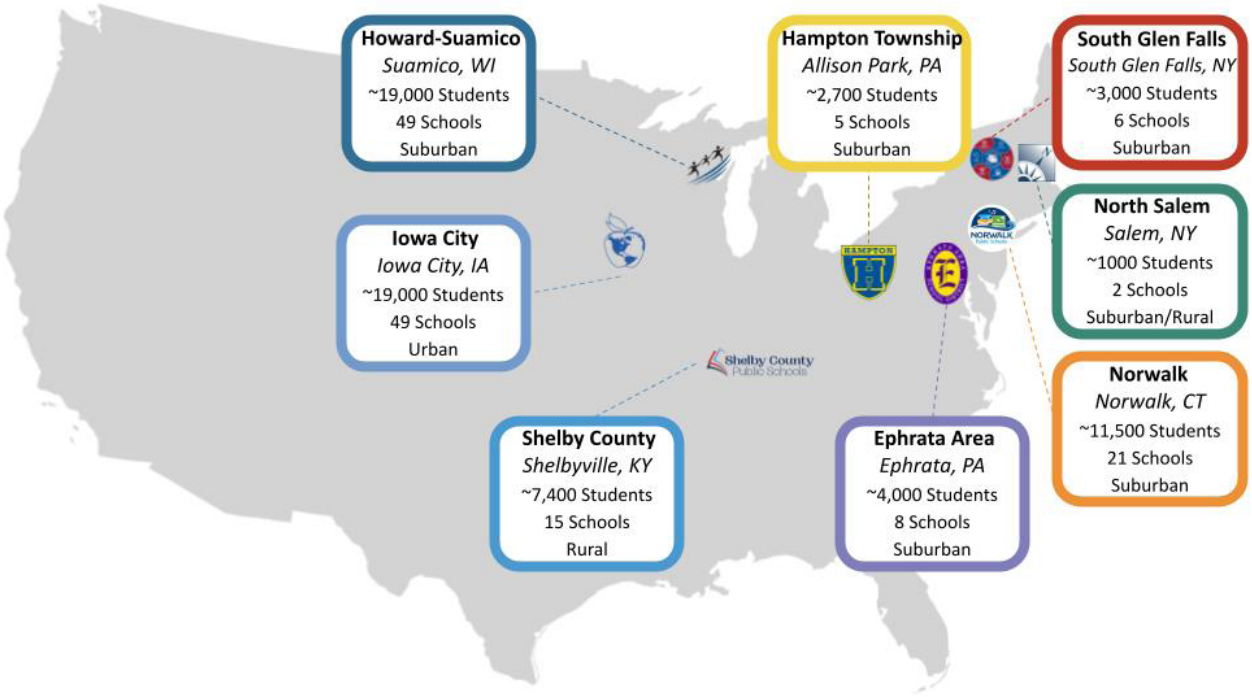


Table 1. Overview of Districts Interviewed

District	Details	Portrait of a Graduate Overview	Assessment Approaches
Cherry Hill Public Schools (NJ)	Suburban 10,700 students 18 schools	**Launch:** 2024 **Future-ready skills:** Portrait of a Graduate Adaptability, Determination, Advocacy, Open-minded, Empathy, and Integrity.	Under development
Ephrata Area School District (PA)	Suburban 4,000 students 8 schools	**Launch:** 2015 **Future-ready skills:** Life Ready Graduate **Acquire the Knowledge** (Content Mastery & Financial Literacy, Healthy Living, Wellness, & Self-Awareness, Civics, Leadership, & Service, and Digital Literacy & Technological Proficiency) **Apply the Skills** (Communication & Empathy, Critical Thinking & Problem Solving, Creativity & Innovation, and Collaboration & Teamwork) **Demonstrate the Dispositions** (Honesty, Integrity, & Responsibility, Adaptability & Flexibility, Continual Learning & A Growth Mindset, and Resilience & Grit).	Curriculum-embedded classroom activities, Performance tasks, Rubrics, Self-evaluation, Report Cards, Dashboard
Floyd County Public Schools (KY)	Rural 8,900 students 15 schools	**Launch:** 2023 **Future-ready skills:** Portrait of a Graduate Empowered Learner, Innovative Designer, Global Collaborator, Computational Thinker, Digital Citizen, Creative Communicator and Knowledge Constructor.	Under development, piloting Curriculum-embedded classroom activities, Defense of learnings, Rubrics, Self-evaluation, Badging
Hampton Township School District (PA)	Suburban 2,600 students 5 schools	**Launch:** 2022 **Future-ready skills:** Portrait of a Talbot Collaboration, Empathy, Communication, Learner's Mindset, Critical Thinking, and Perseverance.	Curriculum-embedded classroom activities, Defense of learnings, Rubrics, Self-evaluation, Badging
Howard-Suamico School District (WI)	Suburban 5,600 students 9 schools	**Launch:** 2015 **Future-ready skills:** Graduate Profile Self-Starter, Critical Thinker, Collaborator, Communicator, Adaptable, Responsible, Solutionist.	Curriculum-embedded classroom activities, Performance tasks, Rubrics, Self-evaluation
Iowa City Community School District (IA)	Urban 19,000 students 49 schools	**Launch:** 2019 **Future-ready skills:** Portrait of a Graduate Adaptability, Empathy, Communication, Global Citizens, Critical Thinking, Learner's Mindset.	Under development
Indian Prairie School District #204 (IL)	Suburban 25,600 students 34 schools	**Launch:** 2018 **Future-ready skills:** Portrait of a Graduate Communication, Creativity & Innovation, Citizenship, Critical Thinking & Problem solving, Resilience, Flexibility & Adaptability.	Under development

District	Details	Portrait of a Graduate Overview	Assessment Approaches
North Salem Central School District (NY)	Suburban, with rural character 1,000 students 2 schools	**Launch:** 2015 **Future-ready skills:** Profile of a Graduate Critical and Creative Thinker, Collaborator, Communicator, Citizen, Continuously Improving Learner.	Curriculum-embedded classroom activities, Performance tasks, Rubrics, Self-evaluation
Norwalk Public Schools (CT)	Suburban 11,500 students 21 schools	**Launch:** 2024 **Future-ready skills:** Portrait of a Graduate Synergistic Collaborator, Critical Thinker, Effective Communicator, Global Citizen, Self-Directed Learner.	Under development, piloting Curriculum-embedded assessments, Performance tasks, Rubrics, Self-evaluation
Quaker Valley School District (PA)	Suburban 1,800 students 4 schools	**Launch:** 2025 **Future-ready skills:** Communicate and collaborate, Empathize and connect, Explore and learn, Persevere and grow, Engage and contribute	Under development
Quakertown Community School District (PA)	Suburban 4,600 students 8 schools	**Launch:** 2025 **Future-ready skills:** Portrait of a Graduate Curiosity, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Perseverance, and Pride in Learning.	Under development
Reynoldsburg City Schools (OH)	Suburban 7,300 students 16 schools	**Launch:** 2022 **Future-ready skills:** Portrait of a Graduate is Innovative problem solver, Collaborative, Socially and emotionally competent, Socially aware and a global citizen, Effective communicator.	Under development
Shaler Area School District (PA)	Suburban 3,800 students 7 schools	**Launch:** 2022 **Future-ready skills:** Portrait of a Graduate Resourceful, Flexible, Compassionate, Resilient, Curious, Socially responsible.	Under development
Shelby County Public Schools (KY)	Rural 7,400 students 15 schools	**Launch:** 2017 **Future-ready skills:** Profile of a Graduate Responsible Collaborator, Effective Communicator, Critical Thinker, Inspired Innovator, Global Citizen, Lifelong Learner.	Curriculum-embedded classroom activities, Defense of learnings, Rubrics, Self-evaluation, Dashboard
South Glens Falls Central School District (NY)	Suburban 2,900 students 6 schools	**Launch:** 2015, 2021 **Future-ready skills:** Portrait of a Bulldog Adaptable Problem Solver, Critical Thinker, Creative Innovator, Empathetic Influencer, Responsible Citizen, Collaborative Learner.	Curriculum-embedded classroom activities, Rubrics, Self-evaluation, Badging
Vista Unified School District (CA)	Suburban 23,500 students 31 schools	**Launch:** 2021 **Future-ready skills:** Learner Portrait contains Kind and Confident, Curious and Connected, Capable and Knowledgeable.	Under development, piloting Scenario-based tasks leveraging emerging technologies

Appendix B

Additional resources to learn more about Portraits of a Graduate	
A synthesis report of 65 school district Portraits of a Graduate	Shifting Education with Learning Pathways: Becoming Your Portrait of a Graduate
A gallery of examples of school district Portraits of a Graduate	Getting Smart Portrait of a Graduate Gallery

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- Dawn Driscoll, Pearson
- Andrew Fenstermaker, Iowa City Community School District
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