



# 5 Essential Skills

Every High School Student

# Needs to Know

Research tells us that 70% of the jobs our children will possess when they become adults do not currently exist. In what ways can schools prepare students for a future that has yet to be created? As **“Schools of the Future: The Big Shifts,”** a TEDX talk by former head of NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools) Patrick Bassett makes clear, rapid technological change and unprecedented access to information and knowledge means that our schools need to shift focus from “knowing” to “doing.”

21st Century learners need to develop a myriad of skills before high school. Here, we identify five essential competencies that students need to be productive and successful leaders in their high school of choice.

## 1

### **Use technology to create, innovate or produce an original piece of work.**

In an increasingly complex digital society, students need to be able to do more than just consume technology. By the time a student graduates 8th grade, he or she should be able to use a variety of technology-based tools to create, innovate, express ideas or produce an original piece of work. When students become makers using technology, whether it's writing computer code, designing an app or building a robot, the process develops lifelong abilities that helps students think logically, problem solve and arrive at deeper understanding of how the world works.



#### **What to look for in a school**

MEANINGFUL INTEGRATION of laptops, 3D printers, Smarboards, iPads and other hardware and software into classroom learning and projects. The breadth of technology isn't nearly as important as the level of depth or authenticity employed. These questions can help you determine how well technology

- **How is technology integrated into classroom curriculum?**
- **In what ways do students use technology to innovate, create or produce an original piece of work?**
- **How does the school develop digital citizenship in its students?**
- **How does the school develop digital literacy in its students?**

## 2

### Create a persuasive piece, in writing or digitally, that is on a current social topic of importance.

Students need to express their understanding of subject matter in a myriad of forms and contexts including expository writing, analytical writing and public speaking. Forming a coherent, well-researched persuasive argument, however, is central to the study of all disciplines and to students' future success as scholars and engaged citizens. Prior to high school, students should be able to create and effectively present a persuasive argument. This type of skill fosters accountability in learning and helps students critically evaluate information and opinions for themselves.



#### What to look for in a school

A COMPREHENSIVE WRITING PROGRAM that exposes children to multiple genres and grows increasingly complex as students move up by grade.

These questions can help you identify school curricula that broaden and deepen students' writing, speaking and presentation skills:

- **Do students keep independent journals?**
- **When and how do children learn how to give and receive constructive criticism on writing?**
- **Is “speaking up,” whether it’s asking questions or contributing to the discussion, a daily part of classroom routines?**
- **Are students given ample opportunity to draft, edit and revise their work?**
- **Does the curriculum require students to formulate a thesis statement, conduct research and present findings orally, in writing and in multimedia formats?**

## 3

### Produce or perform a work of art.

Children think creatively when they engage in the visual and performing arts. The consistent practice and exposure to the arts, from preschool all the way through middle school, helps students develop into naturally creative thinkers who can invent, innovate and express original ideas. Whether it is tackling a challenging piece of instrumental music, or capturing individual characteristics in a self portrait, the arts build problem solving abilities, persistence and focus, essential skills every high school student needs.



#### What to look for in a school

A WELL-INTEGRATED ARTS CURRICULUM. The extent that visual and performing arts are connected to language arts, social studies, world languages, science and other core academic subjects should give you a sense of the school's commitment to meaningful learning through the arts.

You can gauge a robust school's arts program by asking these questions:

- **How are the arts integrated with the curriculum?**
- **Does the school have a dedicated arts faculty?**
- **What opportunities do students have to showcase or perform artistic works they have developed?**

## 4

### Describe a breakthrough in their own learning.

When students can explain findings from a scientific experiment, draw valid conclusions from the statistical analysis of a large data set, or articulate the ways they have matured as writers and presenters — they are demonstrating important discoveries or developments in their own learning. This is a crucial skill set for today's learners. Middle school students who can reflect on their work and accurately assess strengths, areas for improvement and the steps needed to reach their goals will be well prepared to manage responsibilities and challenges in high school and college.



#### What to look for in a school

**A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO STUDENT ASSESSMENT.** Schools that use multiple strategies to gauge student learning — tests, portfolios, conferencing and self-assessment, to name a few — encourage meaningful reflection and motivation for students to take ownership of their own learning.

Here are some important questions to ask about a school's approach to student assessment:

- **Do students conduct self-assessments?**
- **When and how does self-assessment begin?**
- **What standards or rubrics are used in assessment?**
- **What practices does the school employ to ensure that students have an understanding of how their progress is measured?**

## 5

### Exercise leadership.

Students who lead are critical thinkers and problem solvers who can articulate ideas and motivate and inspire others. When 8th grade students achieve consensus with peers on a challenging group project, transform ideas into concrete action or become role models to younger students, they are exhibiting significant leadership capabilities. Faculty-student relationships are central to fostering leadership. When students are encouraged to explore subject matter further or feel empowered to approach a problem a different way, they develop into resilient young adults who can adapt to new and challenging situations.



#### What to look for in a school

ROBUST LEARNING COMMUNITY that encourages responsibility for others.

These questions can help you determine the level of connectedness and commitment to developing student-leaders:

- **Does the school culture encourage students to step out of their comfort zone, try new skills and embrace mistakes as opportunities to improve and learn more?**
- **Do students have opportunities to mentor younger students?**
- **How do students contribute to the overall well-being of the school community?**

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