



Step Two:

Using assessments of college readiness for school improvement

a joint project of:

cwra+

college & work
readiness assessment



New Tech Network



New Tech Network

cwra+

college & work
readiness assessment

New Tech Network collaborates with public schools to create vibrant learning organizations where students graduate ready for college and career. We work with district teams, school leaders and teachers to create authentic learning that is grounded in inquiry, reflection, and individual agency.

For more information, visit: www.newtechnetwork.org

The College & Work Readiness Assessment (CWRA)—a division of the Council for Aid to Education (CAE)—is a problem-based assessment of 21st century skills founded in 2006 in response to the dearth of tools available for measuring key deeper and essential learning skills—like critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication—in K-12. To date, over 280 of the most innovative and progressive middle and high schools across the country have counted themselves as CWRA partners.

For more information, visit: www.cae.org/cwra



Patrick Lee is an independent consultant assisting schools, districts, and reform support organizations. He works with leaders around program and policy evaluation; data, technology, assessment, and accountability systems; and ethnography and strategic planning. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley.



Sherrie Reed serves as the Director of Research at New Tech Network. Prior to joining NTN, she spent 17 years as a teacher, administrator and developer of charter schools. She is a Ph.D. Candidate at University of California, Davis and earned a MA and BA in Education and from University of Northern Colorado.

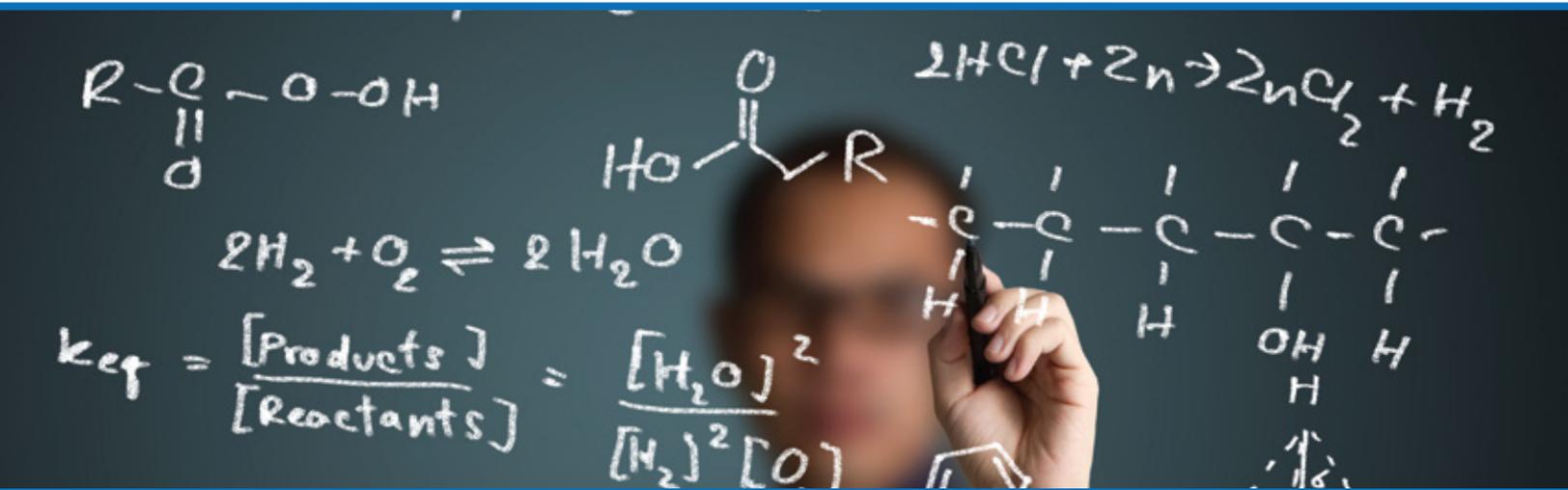


Chris Jackson is the former Director of the CWRA. Chris has also been a high school teacher, an AmeriCorps volunteer, and a children's literacy advocate at Reading Is Fundamental. He has a BA in Creative Writing from the University of Colorado, Boulder, and an MPA from New York University's Wagner School of Public Policy.

Assessing 21st century skills is a critical component in moving students toward college and career readiness. As schools adopt increasingly complex standards for student learning, assessments are needed that can reliably measure critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills. While there's been a focus at federal and state levels on ensuring the alignment of assessments to these skills, less attention has been paid to how schools can actually use the results from these measures to improve teaching and learning.

Which explains why this guide is entitled Step Two. If you're looking for Step One in this series, there isn't one. We have plenty of evidence of schools across the country administering assessments of college readiness. What is often lacking is the important follow through--the answer to the question "What's next?" This guide seeks to answer that question, by offering best practices gleaned from the study of schools across the country that are effectively engaged in Step Two.

In Spring 2014, we conducted research to examine how schools are using data from college readiness assessments. Specifically, we identified schools around the country that are administering the College and Work Readiness Assessment (CWRA) and are implementing strategies to analyze, interpret, and report the results in impactful ways. Through recommendations from the Council for Aid to Education, leaders from a number of high schools were selected for in-depth interviews about their assessment practices. They were asked about their processes for analyzing CWRA data, sharing results with different stakeholders, and using these results for instructional planning. The following spotlights several key strategies that leaders are implementing to make a difference at their schools.



Using Data to Tell Their Story

Sustaining an effective school requires that leaders be able to use data to tell meaningful stories. They must use appropriate analytic strategies and data visualizations to communicate their progress and impact with a range of audiences. Specifically, successful leaders leverage data around students' college readiness and completion to demonstrate their schools' impact on the areas that matter most.

Multiple Measures of College Readiness

Some leaders are routinely examining multiple measures of college readiness for their students to gain a comprehensive picture of preparedness in different content and cognitive skill areas. These assessments include the CWRA, Advanced Placement tests, SAT, ACT, Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), and local assessments of 21st century skills. The Collegiate School in Richmond, VA, for instance, is examining students' written communication skills across different college readiness measures in order to identify performance patterns.

Four-Year Longitudinal Analysis

Schools implementing college readiness assessments for four years or more are starting to conduct longitudinal analysis to study students' progress during their high school experience. The New Tech Network (NTN) based in the San Francisco Bay Area has been implementing the CWRA for over five years and is examining effect scores and student growth patterns for implementing schools.

Linking Results to Postsecondary Enrollment

Data from the National Student Clearinghouse allows some schools to analyze how leading indicators such as HS grade point average, SAT or ACT results, and other measures are correlated to students' college enrollment, persistence, and ultimately, degree completion rates.



Illinois Math & Science Academy

IMSA is a competitive, STEM-focused public high school on the outskirts of Chicago. The school has plenty of outcomes data for its graduating students that allow it to tell its story as a high-performing school. But that didn't stop them from asking that slightly unnerving question: "Are the admissions metrics we're using helping us tell our best story?"

IMSA hasn't started using CWRA for admissions purposes, nor have they suggested a move in that direction; however, they have done some analysis to determine (or at least generate a larger hypothesis) whether the CWRA correlates (or is a better predictor of) the types of characteristics its students possess that they believe tells their best story.

Results in Action

New Tech schools across the U.S. with a high percentage of socio-economically disadvantaged students are performing far above expected on the CWRA. The student growth in these schools is closing the gap in higher order thinking skills that exists between them and students in the CWRA comparison group, a group with substantially fewer students of color and more highly educated parents.



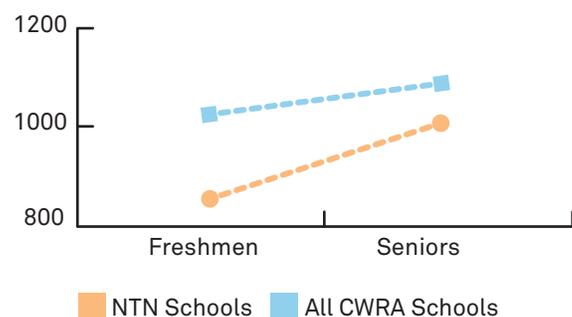
Napa Valley USD & Napa Learns

Napa Valley USD partners with NTN and NapaLearns through the NexTech Project, bringing together 10 schools to implement project based learning, technology-infused instruction, and empowering school cultures.

NVUSD uses several indicators to measure its college and career readiness mission, including college-prep course completion and postsecondary enrollment rates. To ensure students are mastering critical skills needed for college success, the district routinely assesses 21st century skills.

NexTech schools establish school-wide learning objectives that drive their instructional program, including knowledge and thinking skills, content literacy, collaboration, communication, and agency.

2013 Average CWRA Scores





Communicating Results to Stakeholders

Communicating implementation and outcome results is critical to engaging the entire school community. School leaders recognize that data can be overwhelming to interpret, and therefore employ unique strategies to review and make sense of assessment results. Whether it be to share program successes with parents and families, to provide actionable findings to teachers, or to identify areas of successes and challenges with individual students, leaders use various tools to communicate results for different purposes.

Sharing Results with Students

As schools explore the power of having students reflect on their own assessment results, leaders are conducting individual student conferences to examine strengths and weaknesses, engaging students in establishing goals around specific 21st century skills, and instituting recognitions for those who perform well on college readiness assessments. Counselors at Asheville School in Asheville, North Carolina, for example, are documenting CWRA results in each student's college folder to recognize student growth.

Sharing Results with Teachers

Several school leaders have intentionally built the data literacy capacity of their staff. In so doing, they've selected one or two key statistics to present at school-wide or department meetings to create a common language. For the CWRA in particular, some schools have decided to focus on effect size scores with their staff.

Sharing Results with Parents and Families

While some schools keep parents and families abreast of assessment timelines via newsletters, others are beginning to involve parents directly as accountability stakeholders. For example, leaders in Virginia Beach City Public Schools are reviewing CWRA results during parent meetings to understand both individual performance as well as school-wide progress.

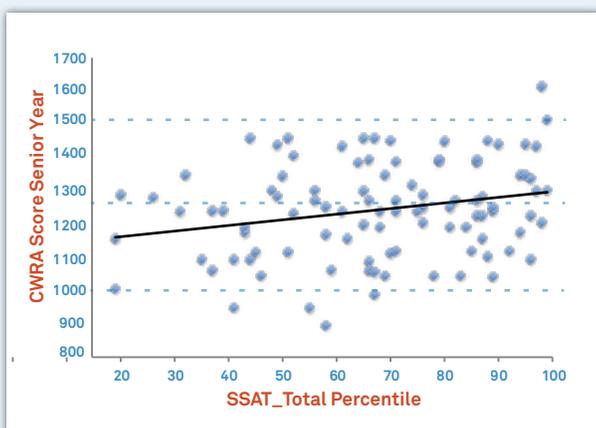


Asheville School

As an independent college preparatory boarding school, Asheville School faces pressure from stakeholders to demonstrate increased student achievement. In fact, trustees and parents alike want evidence that Asheville students outperform schools of similar size, geography or reputation.

Yet, despite Asheville's relatively high performance, Head of School Arch Montgomery explains that the value of the CWRA isn't in proving that one school is better than another, but rather in its power as "the catalyst to lead all schools toward better results with students."

For Asheville, the strength of authentic assessment is the utility to engage stakeholders in the communal practice of advancing the population it serves, not simply through its ability to rank.



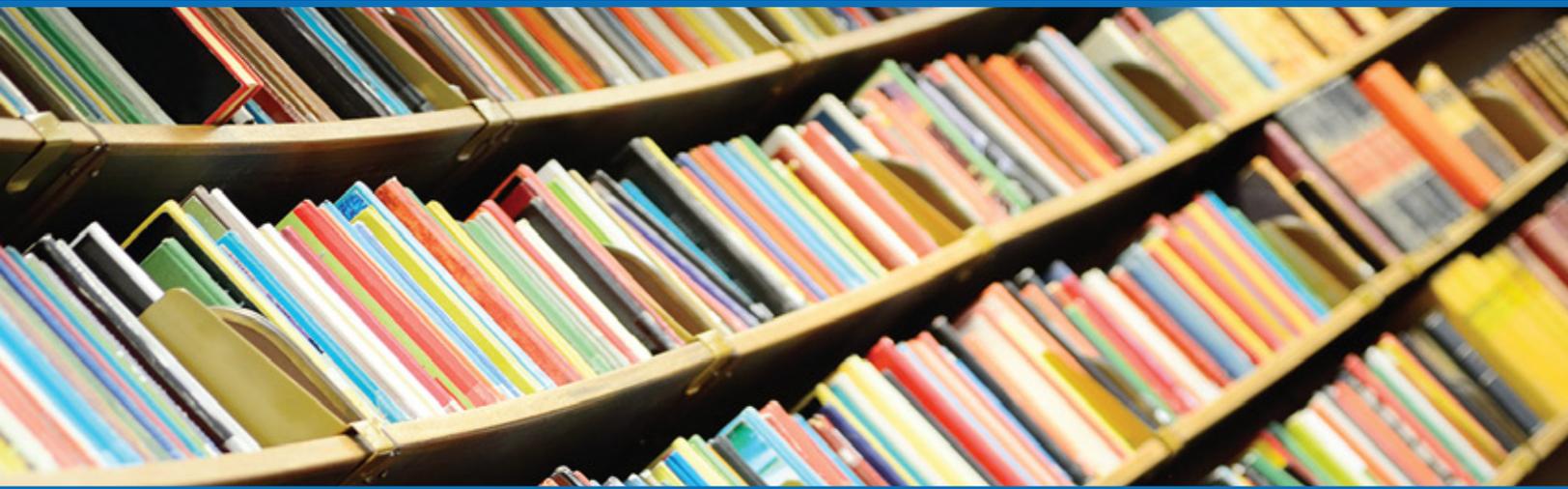
nex+Gen Academy

nex+Gen Academy, an Albuquerque-based public magnet school, partners with Sandia National Laboratories and Intel Corporation to prepare students for 21st century careers.

nex+Gen's success is due in part to its intentional focus on maintaining a positive school culture. Each year, the students participate in a survey, administered by Youth Truth. Together, a team of select staff and students examine the survey results, determine implications, and develop a plan of action to improve the school culture. The team then shares their insights and survey results across the community, engaging all stakeholders in the process of maintaining a positive learning environment for everyone.

Results in Action

Asheville School must demonstrate to stakeholders that the high performance of graduates isn't simply a result of admitting high performing students. Analysis of CWRA scores and the Secondary Schools Admissions Test (SSAT) reveals that only 6% of student growth in 21st century skills is due to entering academic ability. Indeed, students' substantial growth in 21st century skills is a result of their experience at Asheville School.



Instructional Planning and Pedagogical Evolution

As schools confront the implementation of increasingly rigorous and complex learning standards, they must employ strategies and tools to align their instructional program. Leaders need to engage their staff in deep instructional planning and to develop the school's pedagogical practices to effectively meet these standards. For some schools, this includes creating performance-based student assessments, training staff on using college and career readiness data to drive classroom practice, and targeting professional development opportunities for teachers.

Performance Task Assessments

Several schools are adopting performance-based tasks to assess students' 21st century skills. For example, schools such as Mount Vernon Presbyterian School in Atlanta, Georgia, and Currey-Ingram Academy in Brentwood, Tennessee, have developed tasks modeled after the CWRA, including prompts, source documents, and scoring rubrics similar to the assessment.

21st Century Skills Planning

School leadership teams are reviewing results to identify trends in college readiness measures. In some instances, the data review is linked back to school-wide goal setting around critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, or creativity. At other schools, such as St. Andrew's School in Middleton, Delaware, the focus has been on deeper dives around the areas of the CWRA rubric and conducting backwards mapping to department level curriculum.

Data Training for School Support Staff

In some systems, instructional coaches, school improvement specialists, and other support roles are taking on responsibilities to facilitate reviews of college readiness assessment results and to lead instructional planning sessions with school staff.

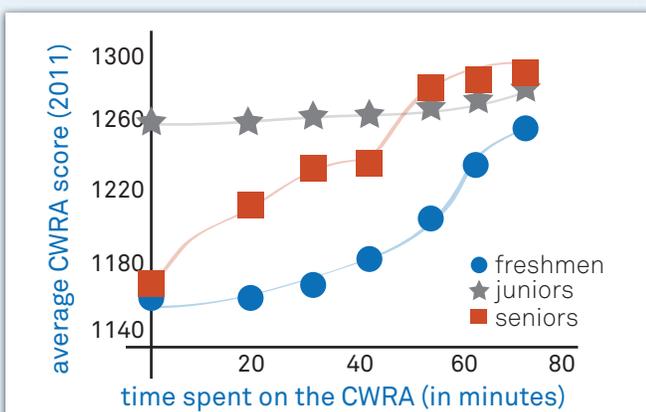


St. Andrew's School

St. Andrew's Director of Innovation had the epiphany that the best way to help faculty better understand the CWRA was by having them actually sit for it.

Within a 40 minute meeting, faculty reviewed a sample version of the CWRA, drafted their own responses, then began discussing what teaching practices best develop the skills they value most—those measured by the CWRA.

Faculty felt engaged and validated having a say in school pedagogical and assessment conversations. In the long run, faculty enthusiasm for authentic teaching and assessment practices will surely influence the way students themselves view and engage in those same practices.



New Tech West High School

Located in Cleveland Metropolitan School District, New Tech West models a 21st century workplace. The school produces graduates with academic, technical, social and collaborative skills and the confidence necessary for success in their postsecondary endeavors.

Striving to meet this mission, New Tech West uses college ready assessments (CRAs) to drive instructional practice. CRAs are performance assessments aligned with CCSS and embedded in project-based learning. Teachers examine performance on the CRAs closely and adjust instruction to help students revise their work to a level aligned with college expectations.

As a result, teachers aim instruction towards high standards, but personalize for individual student need.

Results in Action

When faculty are engaged, students are engaged. One metric schools can use to infer student engagement is time on task. It comes as no surprise to St. Andrew's School that when their students are more motivated to do well, they actually perform better (though-interestingly-in 2011, St. Andrew's juniors performed well on the CWRA no matter how much time they spent on the assessment).



Engaging Institutions of Higher Education

Schools and districts are increasingly engaging institutions of higher education when planning and implementing their college and career readiness priorities. While establishing the parameters for readiness was traditionally the domain of colleges and universities themselves, these institutions are collaborating with secondary (and, in some instances, elementary) schools to inventory the appropriate criteria for defining readiness. Schools that are cultivating these relationships are also capitalizing on important teaching and learning resources that institutions of higher education are providing.

Starting the Conversation

Some schools and school districts express frustration with the current metrics that are widely used by college admissions offices to determine student candidacy. Not content to wait for the system to evolve, these same schools are instigating the conversation with colleges and universities by including information on student transcripts—like CWRA scores—that they consider a more accurate reflection of their mission and values. In response, admissions officers are gently forced to inquire about (and consider) students' 21st century competencies in their decision-making process.

Anticipating Future Trends

Knowing how admissions officers make decisions can influence how teachers and administrators direct their efforts. Some CWRA member schools try to stay ahead of the curve by surveying the admissions offices of the colleges their students typically attend. The good news, they report, is that less emphasis is being placed on pragmatic considerations like test scores and grades, and more is placed on students' 21st century capacities, such as their ability to express themselves and define their passions.

Partnering Around College & Career Readiness

Colleges and universities are key partners for many schools when deepening a culture of college and career readiness. Principals are collaborating with higher education institutions to expand their role in providing greater access to courses and learning resources. For many New Tech schools, this involves not only valuable opportunities for students to earn dual credit, but also partnerships with college faculty to provide expertise to classroom projects.



Virginia Beach City Public Schools

VBCPS was among the first public school districts to adopt the CWRA. Initially, VBCPS administered the CWRA to its seniors, but switched over to juniors for reasons core to their strategic plan: Compass to 2015.

Moving to a junior administration helped students find greater meaning in the value of the CWRA. Further, VBCPS began including CWRA scores on students' transcripts to couple core content knowledge with key 21st century capacities. This action also fostered a conversation between the district and the colleges its students apply to about the academic values to which VBCPS aligns.

Since VBCPS switched over to juniors, many other schools—both public and private—have followed suit.



Tech Valley High School

Tech Valley High School partners with local colleges and universities in the Albany, New York area to provide students with rigorous, authentic learning opportunities that will effectively prepare them for colleges and careers.

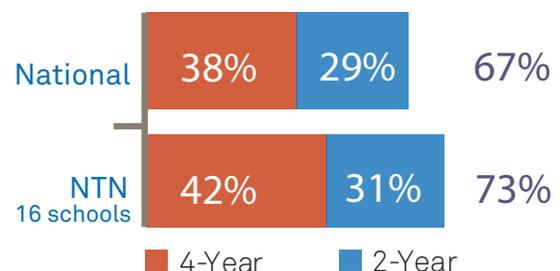
Located on the campus of Colleges of Nanoscale Science and Engineering at SUNY Polytechnic Institute, TVHS offers a half day Senior STEM program for students to earn dual course credit and to utilize the college's world-class research facilities.

Other postsecondary institutions also serve in significant roles, offering diverse work-based learning experiences and serving as technical experts and models for various projects across the school's integrated courses.

Results in Action

The intentional work around college ready assessments is paying off. School leaders are engaging stakeholders in reviewing results, planning for instructional improvement, and partnering with local colleges, AND students are enrolling in college at higher rates. Across New Tech Network, graduates enroll in college at a rate six percentage points higher than the national average.

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT Year After Graduation, Class of 2012



Network Support

Many of the innovations that come out of CWRA and New Tech Network are the brainchildren of our member schools who notice opportunities to improve our services through their own implementations. While we have much to learn from our partnering members—in ways that ultimately benefit all members—it is, of course, not our organizations’ intent that our schools “go it alone.”

This document focuses on the ways that a handful of our member schools have used college-ready assessments to meet their individual needs and goals. Both the CWRA and New Tech Network consistently focus on improvement of services to assist our schools and ensure that we collectively remain at the front of the progressive education movement.

cwra+

Authentic assessment works best when paired with effective and engaging pedagogy.

To that end, through professional development workshops, CWRA staff regularly work with faculty from across the country to better align teaching and learning with performance-based approaches to curriculum and content.

Further, CWRA staff work closely with school, district, and organization administrators to interpret and use assessment data to both pinpoint specific areas of improvement and give evidence-based voice to their mission statements.



New Tech Network

New Tech Network, a national non-profit, works closely with district and school leaders to establish the culture and systems within elementary, middle and high schools to support continuous improvement.

We provide training, coaching, tools and a ground-breaking learning management system that help change schools’ practices.

Currently, more than 160 schools in 25 states and the District of Columbia are part of the New Tech Network. To support learning across the diverse Network, we facilitate opportunities for collaboration and shared learning for educators of all levels working in New Tech districts and schools.

CAE



New Tech Network

© 2015