

Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action

DRAFT 2 for Public Comment

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1. Introduction

Learning in the 21st Century has taken on new dimensions with the exponential expansion of information, ever-changing tools, increasing digitization of text, and heightened demands for critical and creative thinking, communication, and collaborative problem solving. To succeed in our rapid-paced, global society, our learners must develop a high level of skills, attitudes and responsibilities. All learners must be able to access high-quality information from diverse perspectives, make sense of it to draw their own conclusions or create new knowledge, and share their knowledge with others.

In recognition of these demands, the American Association of School Librarians has developed standards for the literacy, technology, critical thinking, and information skills that all learners need to acquire. The new standards, entitled *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*, take a fresh approach and a broad perspective on student standards in the school library field by focusing on the learning process, not on the more limited concept of information literacy. These standards lay out underlying common beliefs as well as standards and indicators for essential skills, dispositions, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies for all learners.

These standards represent high expectations for today's learners, because they will provide the foundation for learning throughout life. The standards and indicators will serve as guideposts for school library media specialists and other educators in their teaching, because these skills and dispositions are most effectively taught as an integral part of content learning.

The focus of these standards is on the learner, but implicit within every standard and indicator is the necessity of a strong school library program that offers a highly-qualified school library media specialist (a term used interchangeably with librarian), equitable access to up-to-date resources, dynamic instruction, and a culture that nurtures reading and learning throughout the school.

Overview of the Standards

The fact that these standards are focused on academic and personal learning is evident from the flow of learning represented by the standards themselves. The first standard addresses the process of investigating and gaining knowledge. In the second standard, learners are expected to extend that knowledge by drawing their own conclusions, making decisions, applying the knowledge to new situations, and creating new knowledge. In today's interconnected world, learners must go beyond the knowledge they have gained independently, because they are increasingly called upon to collaborate and share their knowledge with others, following ethical guidelines (Standard 3). At the apex of the learning taxonomy is the pursuit of personal and aesthetic growth, the motivation and skills to learn on one's own to satisfy internal needs and interests (Standard 4).

Reading, viewing, and listening comprehension is embedded throughout the standards and indicators. Every learner must be able to go beyond decoding to make sense of text, whether the text is traditional print or nonprint, digital, visual, or oral. Library media specialists understand that the skills of reading, viewing, and listening comprehension may vary according to the type and content of the text, but all fall within the realm of these 21st-century standards.

Also integrated throughout the standards and indicators are critical and creative thinking skills. Learners are expected to develop skills and strategies at all cognitive levels, described in the original Bloom's Taxonomy (Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation) (Bloom, 1956) and in the revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, Create) (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). The highest level in the revised taxonomy, Create, is highlighted in Standard 3, but creative thinking is also essential to standards 1, 2, and 4.

Overview of the Strands

Four strands of learning are delineated in *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner – Skills, Dispositions in Action, Responsibilities, and Self-Assessment Strategies*. Any learning is based on **Skills**; in fact,

national standards in every curriculum area outline some of the skills as well as the content for that discipline. These standards, however, take a broader approach to the learning process. Successful learners have developed not only the skills of learning, but also the dispositions to use the skills. **Dispositions** are the learning behaviors, attitudes, and habits of mind that transform a learner from one who is *able to* learn to one who actually *does* learn. Dispositions can be taught by structuring assignments and learning environments so that they require persistence, flexibility, divergent thinking or any other learning behavior. They can be assessed through documentation that the student has followed the behavior during his learning process. For example, the student may be asked to document his critical stance by evaluating the information he found on the right side of two-column notes.

Responsibility is the third strand included in the standards. The goal of any educational system is that students will emerge as responsible and productive members of society. For that to happen, students must be taught responsibility over the years of schooling. Probably the most effective method of teaching responsibility is to follow a process of gradual release of responsibility, in which the teacher assumes a strong, guiding role at first and then gradually transfers that responsibility to the student as the student develops the capacity to assume it. For example, students who are expected to respect copyright/intellectual property rights must learn through a series of experiences how to avoid plagiarism and the importance of relying on their own thinking.

The fourth strand is **Self-Assessment Strategies** in recognition of the importance of self-regulation in any learning process. Learners must be able to look at their own work to determine the quality, discover gaps in their own thinking, ask questions to lead to further investigation, find areas that need revision or rethinking, recognize their new understandings, and determine when they need to ask for help. The metacognitive aspects of self-assessment lead to higher levels of thinking and self-monitoring. Self-assessment complements but does not replace assessment by the library media specialist and classroom teacher.

All four strands are integral to successful learning, but all do not have to be targeted in every instructional experience. Dispositions, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies are not tied to specific standards (unlike the skills), although some naturally align themselves with specific phases of the learning process. These three strands are also not grade-level specific; instead they must be developed over time through many experiences.

Teaching to the Standards

Library media specialists and classroom teachers will find that a collaborative approach to teaching to these standards is most effective, because process skills are best learned in the context of content learning and content is most effectively learned when the necessary learning skills are taught at the same time. Library media specialists should not allow difficulties in collaboration (when they cannot find willing partners or the time to collaborate) to block their teaching of these necessary skills and dispositions. The *Action Examples* in the latter part of this publication include samples of instruction in the library at all levels of collaboration.

Any information processing/research/inquiry model can be used as the structure for the learning process because all of the models have essentially the same phases, as outlined in the standards and indicators themselves. The underlying assumption of these standards is that the only way for learners to develop the skills and dispositions of learning is for them to be given opportunities to construct their own understanding and develop the skills through guided practice. Library media specialists will want to offer direct instruction on the targeted skill, but then scaffold the learning experience so that students are challenged to perform the skill with guidance and then on their own.

Students with special needs and English Language Learners should be expected to learn these skills and given additional support in order to do so. The social nature of learning, that all learning is co-created, may be particularly valuable for differentiating instruction. Students can be strategically paired and grouped and the learning experiences structured so that students have multiple, scaffolded experiences to learn a skill by interacting with others. Integrating all learning modalities (reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and representing) is also helpful for students with different learning needs.

Assessment is an important component to these standards. Library media specialists have the opportunity to include all three forms of assessment (diagnostic, formative, and summative) into their instruction. Diagnostic assessment, conducted before the learning experience, will reveal students' pre-existing level of knowledge and skills as well as their misconceptions. Instruction can be adapted to address the diagnostic findings. Formative assessment is easily integrated into any lesson, because when students produce work, it can be assessed for understanding and quality. Library media specialists can tell from working, annotated bibliographies, for example, whether or not students understand how to evaluate sources and select sources relevant to their research questions. Formative assessment is especially valuable for determining students' understanding of process skills, because those skills are more evident in the day-to-day work than in the final product. Summative assessment, or assessment of the final product, is also useful depending on the skills taught during the unit. If the targeted skill is generating good research questions, the quality of the questions will be more evident from looking at the questions themselves than from looking at the final paper. Rubrics to evaluate final products should include process skills as well as content.

Standards in Action

This publication, *Standards for the 21st Century Learner in Action*, provides support for school library media specialists and other educators in teaching the essential learning skills defined in *Standards for the 21st Century Learner*. In the latter sections, it presents Action Examples for putting the *Standards* into practice, divided into grade-level sections by Benchmark Grades 2, 5, 8, 10 and 12.

The Action Examples are just that – examples. They are designed to give a picture of how a lesson or unit might be designed to teach specific skills, dispositions, and responsibilities in the various situations in which library media specialists have to operate, from a fully designed collaborative unit to a single lesson taught in the library in a 30-minute time span. Each Action Example is based on a scenario that describes very real situations in which library media specialists teach. Each instructional opportunity has merit in helping all our students reach the *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*.