

Stretch Learning

Rigor and Relevance for an Unpredictable World



Lin Kuzmich



**International Center
for Leadership in Education**

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Stretch Learning is one of four dimensions of the Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners. For details on the Learning Criteria, see Appendix A.

The kit addresses one dimension of the Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners — Stretch Learning. The other three are Foundation Learning, Learner Engagement, and Personal Skill Development. All four Learning Criteria dimensions play an important role in education, with three of the dimensions providing the initial skills and knowledge for college or postsecondary training and for the next grade level or course. Stretch Learning, in combination with the other three dimensions, goes beyond this initial course of education by preparing students for an unpredictable future. The International Center believes that stretch learning is essential for the future success of students and in continuing to secure our nation's place on the global stage.

Chapter 1: Preparing Students for an Unpredictable World

Chapter 1 describes an unpredictable future and the type of school that is most likely to prepare students for such unpredictability. The chapter further defines stretch learning and details six conditions and 20 success indicators for this dimension of the Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the Learning Criteria and all four of its dimensions and how these dimensions can be measured to increase student performance.

Chapter 2: Stretch Learning Programs

Chapter 2 provides common programs used across the country and internationally to stretch student learning. Many of the model schools featured in Appendix E use one or more of these programs. These are highly recommended offerings for districts and schools to consider as they develop plans for academic improvement. The

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program sections are:

1. Interest Pathways, Themes, Small Communities, and Career-Based Approaches
2. International Baccalaureate Diploma Program
3. Advanced Placement Courses
4. Dual Enrollment
5. CTE Certification and Joint-Community Programs
6. Intern and Extern Programs
7. Service Learning

Chapter 3: Stretch Learning Approaches

Chapter 3 provides four powerful approaches at the classroom or school level that open up stretch learning opportunities for students. Each of the approaches is a spotlight on learning that incorporates the International Center's Rigor/Relevance Framework.TM The approaches are:

1. inventions
2. community experiences
3. purpose-based thematic units
4. e-portfolios

Chapter 4: Tools for Stretch Learning

Chapter 4 offers tools and strategies that administrators and teachers can duplicate and modify to incorporate rich stretch

learning methods for student success. The tools and strategies are under the following sections:

- Teaching and Learning
- Learning Data Collection and Planning
- Making Stretch Learning Work
- Tools for Stretch Learning in the 21st Century

Chapter 5: Stretch Learning for Students with Special Needs

Chapter 5 is devoted to stretch learning opportunities for students with special needs.

Chapter 5 is devoted to stretch learning opportunities for students with special needs. It includes 12 common factors that most schools share in meeting the needs of all learners. The chapter also includes school case studies in which schools share their stretch learning programs and strategies for unique learners..

Chapter 6: Leadership for Stretch Learning

Chapter 6 includes approaches that leaders can use to foster both discussion and actions for student success. The chapter focuses discussion in the following areas:

- teaching 21st century skills
- preparing students for college
- supporting creativity and innovation in order for students to
- success and adding to the global economy
- upcoming trends that will impact the future of education

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The chapter also details the Framework for 21st Century Learning, developed by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

Appendices

The expanded resources in the appendices are designed to complement the rest of the kit by providing additional background information about the Learning Criteria for 21st Century Learners, useful tools and strategies, and additional model school case studies. The appendices are divided into the following sections:

- A. Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners
- B. Rigor/Relevance Framework
- C. Problem-Solving Ideas for Students
- D. Promoting Student Leadership
- E. Stretch Learning in High-Performing Schools

To increase stretch learning opportunities for all students, administrators and teachers should start by assessing the current state of stretch learning in the district, school, or classroom. Then, one or two stretch success factors should be chosen to increase stretch learning. Follow through by using the rest of the kit to organize and design a stretch learning program. Chapters 1 and 4 are good areas to start with to initiate this process. The accompanying CD contains tools and strategies that can be duplicated or adjusted as needed.

Following are some general tips in starting and sustaining a stretch learning initiative or program:

**Getting
Started**

Tips for success

- Monitor progress along the way.
 - Use student input for a richer and more relevant result.
 - Take time to celebrate progress.
- Monitor progress along the way.
 - Use student input in the process of assessment, planning, and delivery for a richer and more relevant result.
 - Take time to celebrate progress. Students will be more engaged and develop better personal development skills if they are involved and are rewarded for their progress.

The more we teach students to think and innovate and be creative lifelong learners, the easier time they have in any education, community, or work-related endeavor, including excelling on required assessments.

Conley, D. *Redefining College Readiness*.

to student needs are important, the quality and type of instruction, supported by great relationships, makes the most difference in student success. That instruction must reflect the future needs of students to adapt, create, problem solve, and contribute in a global society.

Each of us will inherit the world that someday will be in our children's hands. What do we want that world to look like? What quality of experiences do we wish for us and for our global partners? If we only replicate the past, since it is comfortable and familiar, we will not be a contender in the global economy or a notable contributor to the well-being of the next generation. By helping students stretch their learning outside of their — and our own — current boundaries and extend it to the world at large, we have a better chance to equip them as leaders at the global table.

What Is Stretch Learning?

See Appendix A for a detailed description of the Learning Criteria.

Stretch learning is the demonstration of rigorous and relevant learning beyond minimum requirements. This dimension of the Learning Criteria to Support 21st Century Learners™ encourages schools to examine the degree to which all students are challenged to attempt rigorous coursework, push themselves to take specialized courses, and undertake interdisciplinary projects.

Stretch learning connects to some basic beliefs about pushing the potential of all learners. For one child, it might mean scoring 1600 on the SAT. For a severely disabled child, it might include learning critical day-to-day living skills, such as how to greet someone or self-care habits. The point is that schools must move students beyond their learning comfort zone, whether the learning is occurring in a subject area they love or in a new area they would not otherwise explore on their own.



Chapter 3

Stretch Learning Approaches

Four stretch learning approaches have been developed to move schools beyond the idea of stretch learning as a separate program in the curriculum. These approaches encourage educators to incorporate stretch learning techniques and strategies in regular classroom planning and instructional practices. The approaches are:

1. invention
2. community experiences
3. purpose-based thematic units
4. e-portfolios

These approaches help teachers shift from foundational learning to a more comprehensive 21st century teaching method so that students learn to use basic knowledge in complex inquiry, problem solving, innovative projects, and other creative endeavors. Before these approaches can be fully understood, a thorough understanding of the International Center's Rigor/Relevance Framework™ is needed, since all of four of these approaches are in Quadrant D of the Framework.

In researching successful practices across the country, the International Center has learned that every school has its own unique "DNA." School traditions, facilities, community expectations, and staffing configurations vary greatly. This means there is no single formula for improving all schools. Moreover, a combination of strategies is necessary to achieve a new vision of learning for each school. Still, the most successful schools have one thread that ties together their unique DNA: their vision and mission encompasses a rigorous and relevant education for all students.



Chapter 4

Toolkit for Stretch Learning

This chapter is packed with tools for teachers, students, and schools to help facilitate the process of stretch learning. Feel free to modify any of the tools to suit special circumstances, curricular demands, or the needs of diverse learners. Tools can be used in combination, in parts, or as a whole. These tools also help support the four major stretch learning approaches.

The toolkit contains website links, graphic organizers, evaluation and assessment tools, learning contracts, and planners. Copy or modify these as needed. All of the tools in Chapter 4 are on the CD that comes with this kit.



All tools in this chapter are on the CD.

The Toolkit for Stretch Learning is divided into four sections:

- **Part One: Tools for Stretch Learning and Teaching** — These tools support the planning and implementation of stretch learning conditions and indicators, as described in Chapter 1.
- **Part Two: Tools for Data Collection/Assessing Stretch Learning** — These tools help you gather data, prioritize your work, and plan next steps for stretch learning. There are also some tools for feedback and observation of stretch learning to promote sharing and encourage trying some of the approaches and tools in this kit.
- **Part Three: Tools that Make Stretch Learning Work** — These tools help you to plan and implement stretch learning practices at the classroom and levels.
- **Part Four: Tools for Stretch Learning in the 21st Century** — These tools and resources help you get started using prepared units and online sources that are easy to adapt to various ages and levels of learning.





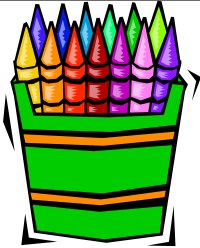


Creating My Own Scoring Guide —Secondary

Here is a sample scoring guide for the creation of a website to convey learning for a project, point of view, or process. A blank template follows to customize. You may need to provide models or help students with initial efforts.

Components	Characteristics	Rate 1-4 (4 is the highest)	Resources
Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant to me or my world Requires me to create, evaluate, or analyze Clear and understandable 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Samples of good goals
Homepage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Title makes sense and grabs the user of the site Big ideas listed Captures attention Visuals that support the big ideas Easy to see links 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample sites Critique of page by peers List of characteristics of intended audience Research sites for project, point of view, or process Use of public domain visuals
Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect categories within the big ideas Enhance the experience of my website Are in a logical location, order, or array If outside sources, these are authentic and useful 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample sites Peer review Authentication of outside sites
Graphics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell a clear message about the big ideas or categories Graphics after linking make sense for the details Graphics are accurate for the content I need to convey 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of public domain visuals
Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homepage and links are organized Layout makes the site easy to use Layout makes sense to the product, point of view, or process I am explaining My intended audience would find the layout helped them use the site easily 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer review or review by intended audience
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content is accurate and/or creative Content is appropriate for the public Content is comprehensive Content demonstrates my creativity and critical thinking 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher feedback My own self-evaluation Audience rating of my site

Creating My Own Scoring Guide — Elementary

Example #2 – For the End of a Project

What to Do	How I Did
 <p style="text-align: right;">Try it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Took turns ✓ Tried everything ✓ Talked about it
 <p style="text-align: right;">Read</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Read together ✓ Read myself ✓ Talked to my partner
 <p style="text-align: right;">Color</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Colored a picture of the most interesting part ✓ Added details
 <p style="text-align: right;">Practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Talked to a partner ✓ Webbed my report ✓ Practiced the math in my report
 <p style="text-align: right;">Write</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wrote my report ✓ It has a big idea ✓ It has details ✓ It has my math ✓ It has pictures ✓ It has my final thinking



Chapter 5

Stretch Learning for Students with Special Needs

The International Center has found certain elements that distinguish successful schools. The elements that tie these schools together have been organized as the Success Factor Dozen.

Success Factor Dozen

Stretch learning is different for every student, with each one stretching beyond core learning in his or her own way. While most students can benefit from several of the practices detailed throughout this resource kit, for some students, the story is different. Stretch learning for a student studying English may mean communicating a lunch choice while going through a cafeteria line or understanding a few new words well enough to use them for a homework assignment. For students with health or cognitive issues, navigating the daily routine is a form of stretch learning. Students with high abilities may need a compacted or individualized approach to their education so they, too, can show growth and achievement.

Students who cannot grasp the regular curriculum need alternative resources, perhaps customized instruction, and they usually have an adjusted schedule and various program options to better match their needs. After careful review of case studies from schools across the country, the International Center has found certain elements that distinguish certain schools from others. The level of differentiation needed to meet the needs of every student in today's schools is high. Successful schools meet the needs of every student no matter what it takes. They are creative and student centered in their quest to meet those needs. The elements that tie these schools together have been organized as the Success Factor Dozen. These factors contribute to a school's ability to provide creative options and opportunities for all students. The case studies detailed later in this chapter exemplify these factors.

Successful schools have most of the following 12 factors in common when meeting the needs of all learners. The following Success Factor Dozen table can be used to evaluate success and chart a new course for next steps toward a model stretch learning

Given the four approaches offered in Chapter 3 and many of the other tools throughout this resource kit, leaders can prepare for this new era of education.

- There has been an explosion in gaming technologies and related e-learning that are individually focused and are considered “informal” learning opportunities.
- A report from the U.S. Department of Education has found that students on average performed better in online learning conditions than those receiving face-to-face instruction.
- Respected researchers are predicting that half of all high school credits will be earned online by 2019.

Given the four approaches offered in Chapter 3 and many of the other tools throughout this resource kit, leaders can prepare for this new era of education. Not to prepare for the future is to be left out. Getting ahead of this new era is better than reacting to it after public pressure mounts. If even 50% of the trends described above come to fruition in less than 10 years, education will be markedly different from today. As education leaders prepare for the future, here are some questions to ask teachers, students, parents, community members, boards of education:

- What is a viable curriculum for the 21st century?
- What demonstrations of student learning will be needed beyond the current state assessment system?
- Are students collaborating beyond the school walls?
- Do students and teachers discuss and debate current issues and seek solutions?
- Is there an alternative option for schooling outside of the typical school day?
- Are there multiple online options for students to obtain skills and/or credit and include social networking?

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- Do students help create learning opportunities that are rigorous and relevant and are geared toward the future?

This chapter was designed to give leaders different perspectives about the future and about student needs in the 21st century in the face of the unknown. The questions, charts, and models have common threads and themes that relate to stretch learning. They offer leaders the chance to initiate meaningful dialog so that action-oriented planning reflects these coming changes. It is not whether education will change; it is simply how fast it will change — with or without education leaders at the helm.