

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

a briefing series for new england's educational leaders

We know what works. High schools are doing it every day. Now let's help everyone do it. **It's that simple.**

Learn more about the [New England Secondary School Consortium](#).

What Are Real-World Learning Experiences? (And How Can We Assess Them?)

Why is Latin no longer part of the typical course of study in American high schools? It's because Latin fails today's relevance test—books are not being written in Latin, few people speak the language, and it no longer has widespread usefulness in adult life. Is Latin still a worthwhile academic pursuit? Absolutely. But when schools have limited time, resources, and faculty, they need to make tough decisions and prioritize certain subjects and skills over others. What would happen if similar relevance tests were extended to every subject, course, and classroom? How would it change what gets taught or how teachers teach?

In today's world, relevance, usefulness, and real-world application need to inform every dimension of the high school experience. When students are engaged in real-world learning, they tackle the kinds of tricky, complex problems that do not always have clear answers—just like life. If the solution can be found in the back of a book, or the answer is A, B, C, or D, then chances are it's not real-world learning.

How It Works

- ✓ **Relevance makes learning come alive.** Want students to learn about economics, public policy, or social issues, for example? Have them volunteer at a homeless shelter, interview legislators and city officials, research effective job-creation programs, create a multimedia slideshow or documentary, and then present a practical proposal for alleviating homelessness to local leaders. When schools embrace more flexible and relevant approaches to teaching, a world filled with powerful learning opportunities suddenly appears.
- ✓ **Students learn skills they can apply in every area of life.** Do students only read and analyze ideas in English class? Of course not. Skills such as reading and critical thinking are absolutely essential in everything we do. Whether it's communicating effectively, working productively in teams, using technology, or simply knowing how to be organized and self-disciplined, real-world skills determine employability and success in every domain of life. The better our students can analyze information and solve problems, the more empowered, confident, and self-sufficient they will be as adults.
- ✓ **Schools measure student achievement in multiple ways.** Real-world skills are not facts that can be memorized and recalled, and it's not possible to accurately assess college or work readiness using only multiple-choice questions. In addition to traditional tests, teachers can take advantage of a variety of methods to assess real-world skills, including strategies such as **portfolios** (collections of student work samples compiled over time), **performance exhibitions** (presentations or other events in which students demonstrate what they have learned), **digital assessments** (applications that allow students to meet learning standards at their own pace), and **rubrics** (tools that help teachers consistently evaluate different kinds of student work against the same common high standards).
- ✓ **Students graduate prepared.** By using multiple learning-assessment strategies throughout the school year, teachers can zero in on the specific learning needs of individual students—and then modify what and how they teach those students. If a student masters high-level reading skills but still struggles with writing, the teacher knows—with a much greater degree of precision—what kind of extra help is required. When standards are consistently measured across all courses, subjects, and grade levels, teachers have the information they need to help every student succeed. And when schools prioritize critical real-world skills, they can be confident their students will graduate prepared.

Want to Learn More?

Visit the [Leadership in Action website](#) and download *I Want to Know More*, a selection of information and resources for those interested in reading more about how today's students learn.

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