

Draft Joe Bower Blog post about Skills and about a proposed article about Mastery Transcript (submitted to be shared on Joe's blog)

The Future of “the end of grading”

“Mastery Transcript” is the next step after we abolish grading

By a fan of Joe Bower's blog

Joe Bower owned that phrase: **“Abolish grading.”** If you type a search of “joe end of grading,” the link to his “abolish grading” articles pops up. His work becomes more important now that a group of private schools works to improve the traditional transcript to describe “essential skills.”

“21st Century Skills” appears to be a worn-out meme. Principals, teachers and education reformers have been broadcasting the need for “including employable skills” like critical thinking, oral and written communication, adaptability and agile thinking, and “creativity” (whatever that means).

Less often mentioned are entrepreneuring and initiative (*what teacher wants to make a lesson plan about “take the initiative”? That's like handing the class over to the students!*)

The focus on “Essential Skills” or “The Seven Survival Skills” (Harvard University's Tony Wagner came up with that formula) has generated another box on many lesson plans: *“What 21st Century skills are developed by this lesson plan?”*

So what?

What difference does this pursuit of “mastery of skills” have for students? How do “skills” show up in the traditional transcript? Does it make a difference if a student got an “A” in an advanced course by doing well on a standardized test? Or is it better if that student got a “B” while producing a remarkable multi-month project involving four subjects, but the project still needs some work? Which student is better prepared? Which student has mastered more 21st Century skills? (Probably the kid with a “B”). If a student develops the skill of “innovation,” does the student get an “A” for failing faster?

How to track mastery of skills

A coalition of schools has tackled the issue of “how to transform the traditional transcript.” The coalition, called the Mastery Transcript Consortium, describes itself as *“a collective of high schools organized around the development and dissemination of an alternative model of crediting and transcript generation. This model calls for students to demonstrate a mastery of skills, knowledge and habits of mind by presenting evidence that is evaluated against an institutionally specific standard of mastery.”* Source: *mastery.org*

The Consortium has established three “core principles” for the development of a transcript that tracks mastery of skills:

[1] No Required Standardization of Mastery Credits

The performance areas, credit standards (rubrics, etc.) and credits are specific only to the individual crediting school, and will never be standardized across schools.

[2] No Grades

Letter grading (or numerical equivalent) will not be used. (Yes, fans of Joe Bower’s writing -- there are 150 schools that have signed on to this sentence.)

[3] Consistent Transcript Format

Transcript has to be readable by college admission officers (once trained) in less than two minutes. Therefore, the transcript format has to be reasonably consistent across MTC schools.

Source: mastery.org <http://mastery.org/a-new-model/>

What does this have to do with your school?

1. Mastery Transcripts are coming. So is “the end of grading” as traditional schools know it (see Core Principle 2, above). This is where Joe Bower’s work is important.
2. “Mastery of survival skills” is what Tony Wagner has been preaching since 2008. Search “*Seven Survival Skills Tony Wagner*”
3. The transformation of education and schools happens when teachers cooperate and create “BIG PROJECTS” that span several subjects. Instead of working on 4 projects in four subjects, why not make one big project that earns academic points in Math, Science, History and English Composition? (See “Finnish Schools projects” and TINYURL.com/FinnishSchools)
4. High Tech High has demonstrated how to display these projects on websites that students create and maintain. Privacy can be maintained by limiting the audience to the teacher and other students. When the student has curated a suitable collection of projects, then the link can be opened for college admission officers to visit.

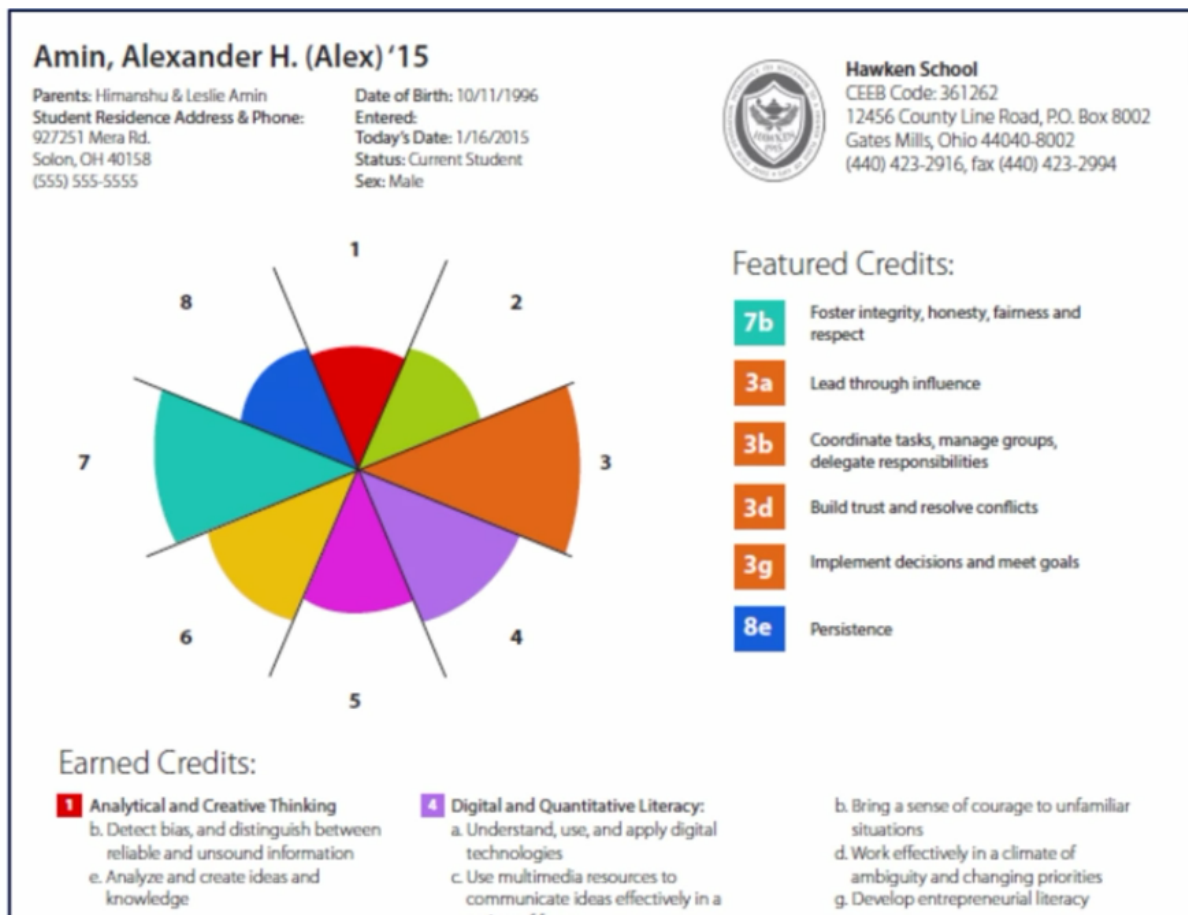
So, since many readers of Joe’s blog are on board with points 2, 3 and 4, what’s up with the Mastery Transcript? Only 150 schools are part of the Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC). If you are working at a school that is not on the list, then perhaps this blog post will be a push for you to visit the following website: **Mastery.org** (the website for the MTC)

And click on the following videos:

Our Vision: <http://mastery.org/our-vision/>

Imagine a transcript: <http://mastery.org/a-new-model/>

The highlight of this second video is the “pie chart,” which shows the skills that the student has mastered using larger slices in the chart. The image gives details of “sub skills”: *delegate responsibilities, coordinate tasks, meet goals, lead through influence, build trust ...* which support the larger skill of “leadership.”



Unveiling the Mastery Transcript

The MTC has laid out three rules to guide the creation of the Mastery Transcript. The website points out that “*we have started with independent*

schools to minimize complication and get a proof of concept built to enable all schools.” Since this proposed focus on skills is such a good idea, why not experiment and build experience within your team of teachers? Why not use professional development to begin discussions about **“what skills do we want to see and form and encourage in our students”**? Those discussions will take place in many schools *after* the MTC releases its findings... but why not get started now by coming up with your school’s list of “essential skills”? Then develop rubrics to give feedback to students (“Not quite there,” “Acceptable,” “Good,” “Outstanding”). The report that the MTC will issue will no doubt guide principals with anecdotes about “what we could improve” and “if only we had known then what we know now.”

But why not get the conversation started within your school (about the mastery transcript, about the end of grading and about the rubric to show mastery) with teachers, students and parents?

- (1) Start with a visit to Mastery.org.
- (2) Join me in writing to the MTC and asking that **Joe Bower’s “end of grading” articles be added to the list of MTC resources.**

About the author

*Steve McCrea is a former high school teacher who read Dennis Littky’s book **The Big Picture: Education is Everyone’s Business** and become a facilitator. He can be found giving mini lectures (under 2 minutes) in his classes, which he uploads so the students can review the mini-lectures. He spends most of his time listening to his students rather than broadcasting. He founded the Free Website Project (TINYURL.com/FWPstart with free ebooks TINYURL.com/sunDP5) in 2016 to encourage his students and other teachers to push students to create and maintain free websites (Weebly and Google Sites are popular at High Tech High in California). He offers free online courses at*

*TINYURL.com/cpppSite and TinyURL.com/CPPPFreeOnlineWorkshop.
Steve greatly admires Joe Bower's blog and has a web page at CPPP to
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THIS DRAFT is offered to Joe's blog

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