Graduate Profiles Brief

Introduction

Decades of educational research combined with recent challenges presented by the pandemic have accentuated the need to educate the whole child. Reports suggest that local school districts and/or states should begin by creating a whole child vision, which often is manifested as a "graduate profile" or a "portrait of a graduate" (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019; Aurora Institute, 2022).

At the time this brief was written, approximately 15 states had developed statewide graduate profiles to redefine student success more holistically. Often, they include social-emotional competencies, 21st century skills (for example, the "4Cs"), and other success indicators to complement core academics that historically have served as the sole measure of student success. In states like California that have not put forth a graduate profile, local education agencies (LEAs) have taken it upon themselves to create graduate profiles.

In order to inform both educators and policymakers, this brief analyzes 50+ graduate profiles developed by LEAs, most of which are school districts and their communities across California. This brief provides: (1) information on the specific knowledge, skills, and characteristics that comprise graduate profiles in California, and (2) the processes several organizations used to develop their graduate profiles. It also provides suggestions on how to develop graduate profiles based on reflections from those who have facilitated the process for their organizations. The findings emerged from an analysis of two data sources: 54 graduate profiles from school districts, schools, and county offices of education in California; and interviews with representatives from a sample of nine school districts in California with graduate profiles.

Graduate Profiles

Data Sources and Analysis

The graduate profiles were developed by districts, schools, and county offices of education (see Appendix A for a complete list of graduate profiles included in the analysis). All of the profiles were publicly available and accessed through the organizations' websites. The sample may not be exhaustive, as profiles included in the analysis were limited to those known by *Scaling Student Success*. Researchers did not search websites of LEAs or contact LEAs to determine whether or not they had a profile. A researcher from WestEd uploaded a PDF or JPEG of each of the profiles to ATLAS.ti, software that supports the analysis of qualitative data.

The researcher then reviewed the profiles and developed categories based on the grouping of similar profile components. The researcher continually refined the categories while grouping the components. For example, the researcher initially developed a category for "Curiosity."

However, while grouping graduate profile components, it was clear that components grouped in the "Curiosity" category often overlapped with components grouped in the "Innovation" category; therefore, the researcher collapsed the "Curiosity" category into the "Innovation" category. This process resulted in 12 categories, listed alphabetically:

1. Character
2. Collaboration
3. College and career navigation
4. Communication
5. Content knowledge
6. Critical thinking
7. Cultural awareness
8. Digital literacy
9. Global and/or civic engagement
10. Innovation
11. Self-direction
12. Wellness

After developing the categories, the researcher categorized the headings in each of the 54 graduate profiles that were publicly available into the 12 categories. If a heading fit into multiple categories, it was categorized as such. For example, the heading "Communication and Collaboration" was categorized into both the "Communication" category and the "Collaboration" category. The heading "Complex, Creative Innovative Thinker and Problem Solver" was categorized into both the "Innovation" category and the "Critical Thinking" category.

Findings

Table 1 displays the categories, definitions, and the number and percentage of graduate profiles with a heading that fit into each category.

Table 1. Categories, Definitions, and the Number and Percentage of Graduate Profiles with Each Component

Graduate Profile Category	Category Definition	Number of Graduate Profiles (N=54)	Percentage of Graduate Profiles
Critical thinking	Students are able to think critically and/or solve problems by completing tasks such as analyzing complex information, overcoming barriers, and developing innovative solutions.	46	85%
Self-direction	Students are self-directed learners who are able to respond to new situations. Some profiles mention students taking initiative,	45	83%

	being flexible and/or adaptable, responsible, and/or resilient.		
Communication	Students can communicate effectively in a variety of different contexts and through a wide range of platforms (e.g., through email, social media, verbally in groups).	44	81%
Collaboration	Students work well with others. This can mean understanding others' perspectives and/or working together towards a desired outcome.	43	80%
Innovation	Students develop new ideas and/or try new things. Many profiles highlight the students being curious and/or creative when thinking about the evolving world.	36	67%
Global and/or civic engagement	Students are engaged in the local and/or global community. This may mean being aware, making informed decisions, positively contributing to the common good, advocating, and/or leading in communities.	33	61%
Character	Students have strong character and/or integrity, which may include being ethical, compassionate, caring, and/or empathetic.	32	59%
College and career navigation	Students explore and plan for postsecondary education and careers (e.g., developing application materials).	15	28%
Cultural awareness	Students demonstrate cultural awareness. This includes having knowledge of diverse cultures, histories, and perspectives of others and the ability to interact respectfully and productively with people from different backgrounds.	13	24%
Digital literacy	Students can use digital tools appropriately and, in some cases, discerningly. This includes the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information from a variety of digital sources.	13	24%
Wellness	The students have a healthy mind and/or body.	9	17%
Content knowledge	The students are proficient in academic competencies.	5	9%

Interviews

Data Sources and Analysis

Interviews were conducted with seven district-level administrators, three school-level administrators, and one county office of education administrator from a total of nine LEAs in November 2022.[1] Each interviewee had a leadership role in the development of their organization's graduate profile and was recommended by *Scaling Student Success*. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes; eight interviews took place through Zoom video conferencing technology and one interview took place over the telephone. The researcher conducted the interview using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B), where questions were used as a guide; however, the interviewers sometimes asked interviewees to expand on responses and/or asked interviewees additional questions that were not on the protocol. To develop the following findings, the researcher reviewed notes from all interviews, developed common themes, identified evidence and examples, and organized findings into categories: (1) process for development; (2) competencies included in profiles; and (3) implementation.

Findings

Information shared by interviewees regarding the development of their organizations' graduate profiles is detailed below.

Process for Development

Facilitation of Process

Interviewees detailed their processes for developing the graduate profile, which varied widely. Some leaders within organizations developed and implemented their own process for facilitating the development of their profiles, and others used outside consultants to guide their process. Regardless of whether or not a consultant was used, all organizations developed the graduate profile through a committee. Interviewees from organizations that used a consultant expressed more satisfaction with the end product because the end product more thoroughly captures community members' input; as a result, community members are more invested in it. Using an outside consultant also allowed leaders to participate in the development process rather than focusing on facilitation of the process.

Champions

Interviewees were champions, or strong supporters, of the graduate profiles who truly believe in the work. Most interviewees got involved with the development of graduate profiles through other organizations, such as school districts they worked at previously or the Coalition of

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[1] In one interview, two district-level administrators participated. In another interview, one district-level administrator and one school-level administrator participated.

Essential Schools, or initiatives, such as Linked Learning. Most interviewees noted that successful implementation of graduate profiles requires champions at both the district and school level; some interviewees suggested that there should be a champion on the organization's Board. Interviewees suggested that ensuring champions are invested in the graduate profile before it is developed is essential in order for the graduate profile to come to fruition.

Input from School and Wider Community Members

Interviewees agreed that it was important to include a wide range of community members in the development process to ensure that the graduate profile reflects diverse needs and perspectives. All leaders interviewed solicited input from district and school faculty and staff members, community members (such as representatives from local institutions of higher education and businesses), and students, but the process for gathering feedback and the number of participants varied widely. Some leaders solicited feedback at meetings, while others sent out surveys to gather input. One organization described a process where students on the committee developing the graduate profile gathered input from other students through interviews. The number of community members who provided input also varied widely; organizations developed the profile through committees that ranged from approximately 6 to 200 members. Outside of the committees, organizations gathered input from up to 2,000 community members.

In most organizations, the development process was iterative, meaning organizations developed a draft of the graduate profile, solicited feedback, and then revised the draft based on input. Some organizations ensured that the final decision about what to include was reached through consensus from all those participating in development, while others made a final decision after seeking input from participants.

Competencies Included in Profiles

Resources

When developing graduate profiles, the most common resource organizations referenced were other organizations' graduate profiles. While interviewees referenced several other organizations' profiles, Pasadena Unified School District's graduate profile was most commonly referenced. Few organizations reviewed research produced by employer groups, academicians, or futurists before or during the development of their graduate profiles.

Types of Competencies

When determining how to represent the input from community members on the graduate profile, interviewees were drawn to the "four Cs," which include communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. None articulated where the idea of the four Cs came from or why the four Cs, specifically, were important in their organizations' graduate profile; rather, the four Cs seemed to be widely accepted and informally agreed upon components to include in a graduate profile.

Number of Competencies

Some interviewees in LEAs with eight or more competencies listed in their graduate profile shared that they wish there were fewer because so many are hard to remember. Some interviewees in LEAs with fewer than eight competencies in their graduate profiles shared that they had to combine multiple competencies into one, resulting in a broad category. For example, an organization combined the competencies "Critical thinking" and "Innovation" to form the competency "Critical and creative thinking." The challenge identified by interviewees is that they want graduates to leave their organizations as well-rounded, productive citizens, which requires a wide range of knowledge, skills, and characteristics; therefore, organizations struggle with paring down the number of competencies included in a profile.

Implementation

Designing with End in Mind

Although the focus of the interview was not implementation of graduate profiles, almost all interviewees cited implementation, specifically the uptake by teachers and students, as a challenge. Interviewees shared that it is important to have the end in mind when developing graduate profiles. Some interviewees discussed the importance of tying the graduate profile to a vision for students so that, as one interviewee put it, "All folks feel like they are working together to meet the hopes and dreams in the profile." Some interviewees referred to the graduate profile as "the north star" for outcomes they want to see in their community. One interviewee suggested including the marketing/communications department in the development so that they can plan for the deployment of the graduate profile.

Some organizations are trying to operationalize their graduate profiles by writing corresponding "I can" or "I will" statements. In order to make a graduate profile actionable, it may be beneficial to include specific benchmarks or indicators for each graduate profile competency during the development stage. Some organizations are doing this work as part of "a refresh."

Students Taking Ownership

Although the interview protocol did not include a question about how students demonstrate mastery of graduate profile competencies, some interviewees were eager to share that

information. For example, one interviewee shared how students develop a portfolio comprised of artifacts (work samples) that demonstrate the student's progress and mastery of graduate profile competencies. Another interviewee shared how their organization implemented student-led conferences, where students demonstrate competencies, such as communication and self-direction, while leading the conferences.

Teachers Taking Ownership

In addition to students taking ownership, interviewees noted the importance of teachers taking ownership of advancing graduate profile outcomes. Interviewees emphasized the need to offer robust professional learning for teachers so that they may intentionally integrate graduate profile competencies into lesson planning.

Conclusion

Overall, developing graduate profiles is a complex and challenging process. Although the current graduate profiles in California include a wide range of competencies, they have the same purpose: to more holistically define student success and prepare young people for life beyond high school so that they may positively contribute to their communities. The successful development of graduate profiles requires both champions who are committed to the work and meaningful input and buy-in from educators at all levels as well as family and community members. One major challenge is balancing the desire to foster in students a multitude of competencies while assuring that a graduate profile is both digestible and attainable. There is no formula for developing a graduate profile—it must be done in a way that honors the organization's context and end goal.

Appendix A: Local Education Agencies Included in Analysis of Graduate Profile Categories

1. Alameda USD
2. Alliance College-Ready Public Schools
3. Anaheim USD
4. Antelope Valley USD
5. Atascadero USD
6. Campbell USD
7. Carlsbad USD
8. Centinela Valley USD
9. Chico Country Day School
10. Citizens of the World Charter Schools
11. Cucamonga SD
12. Davis Joint USD
13. East Side UHSD
14. El Segundo USD
15. Elise Allen High School, Santa Rosa City Schools
16. Elk Grove USD
17. Evergreen ESD
18. Fremont USD
19. Fresno USD
20. Huntington Beach City SD
21. Lindsay USD
22. Long Beach USD
23. Los Angeles USD
24. Madera USD
25. Montebello USD
26. Novato USD
27. Oakland USD
28. Orange USD
29. Oxnard USD
30. Pasadena USD
31. Pittsburg USD
32. Porterville USD
33. School of Engineering and Sciences (SES), Sacramento City USD
34. Sacramento City USD
35. San Bruno Park USD
36. San Francisco USD
37. San Gabriel USD
38. San Leandro USD

39. San Lorenzo USD
40. San Marcos USD
41. San Rafael City Schools
42. San Bernardino City Schools
43. Sandpiper School, Belmont-Redwood Shores SD
44. Santa Ana USD
45. Santa Clara USD
46. Soledad USD
47. Sonoma County Office of Education
48. South Lake Tahoe USD
49. Tulare JUSD
50. Val Verde USD
51. West Contra Costa USD
52. West Sonoma County UHSD
53. Woodland USD
54. Yucaipa-Calimesa JUSD

Appendix B: Graduate Profile Development Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I am a researcher at WestEd. We are working with Scaling Student Success to better understand how graduate profiles in California were developed and what competencies are included in them. The purpose of this interview is to understand the process your district used to develop your graduate profile. All information you share will be kept confidential and only reported on at the aggregate level.

Background

1. Please describe your role at the district.
2. Please provide a quick overview of your districts' demographics (i.e., enrollment, grade span, percentage receiving free or reduced-priced lunch, racial distribution, etc.).
3. How did you get involved with the development and implementation of your district's graduate profile?
4. How did your district decide to move forward with developing the graduate profile? What audience was it intended for?
5. When was your graduate profile developed? Has there been a refresh of your graduate profile? If so, when and why?

Development of Graduate Profile

6. [Display district's graduate profile on screen.] Please describe the process your district used to develop this graduate profile.
   a. How was the process for developing the graduate profile determined? Who led the process? Did you use a consultant? If so, who?
   b. Which educators and community members, if any, provided input on the content? How many from each group provided input?
   c. What methods did you use to gather input from educators and community members?
   d. How, if at all, did your district use existing research, reports, or other sources of expertise to make decisions about what to include in the graduate profile?
   e. How were the visual aspects of the graduate profiles (i.e., graphics, videos, website pages) developed?
   f. Was the process for developing the graduate profile iterative? Did your district start with a working draft of the graduate profile? If so, how did your district gather feedback on the draft?

g. Who made the final decisions about what was included in the graduate profile? Was it approved by the Board?

h. Which competencies, if any, did you consider including but ultimately decided not to? How was that decision made?

7. What costs, if any, were associated with developing the graduate profile?

Reflection

8. Reflecting on the process your district used to develop graduate profiles, what went well? What could have been improved upon? What advice would you offer to others developing a graduate profile?

References

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