



KENTUCKY PORTRAIT OF A LEARNER

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Please feel free to share this document with students, families, and community members who are seeking additional information about the Portrait of a Learner purpose, process and next steps.

Q. WHAT IS A PORTRAIT OF A LEARNER?

A Portrait of a Learner is an agreed-upon set of school- or district-level aspirations for what every learner will know and be able to do when they leave school. That exit may happen at the end of elementary school, middle school, high school graduation or at any other checkpoint along the way. The Kentucky statewide PoL identifies the skills students need to be prepared for an ever-changing world that is driven by technology, human interaction and innovation. This portrait gives school leaders and teachers the framework to design instruction in a way that promotes real-world competencies and job readiness.

Q. WHY CREATE A PORTRAIT OF A LEARNER FOR KENTUCKY?

Now, more than ever, learning experiences must not be just about mastering challenging academic content. They also must be more intentional about fostering communication, collaboration, adaptability and other skills our students need to thrive.

Kentucky's accountability system needs to provide a more comprehensive picture of what student success means. The Kentucky Portrait of a Learner (PoL) will help do this by serving as a more balanced measure, demonstrating a student's growth and achievement and ensuring their readiness for civic life, career or college.

Q. WHO WAS INVOLVED IN CREATING KENTUCKY'S PORTRAIT OF A LEARNER?

In 2019, a group of districts with existing local PoLs worked together as the [Kentucky Competency Education and Assessment Consortium](#) to compare local competencies and create a model that represented common skills across multiple communities.

In May of 2022, a [state-level Portrait of a Learner \(PoL\) subcommittee of the Kentucky Board of Education \(KBE\) met for the first time](#) to begin creating a statewide PoL for districts to adopt as their own or to serve as a model for districts in the creation of their own local portraits. This subcommittee was guided by the work of the Kentucky Competency Education and Assessment Consortium districts to develop the skills/dispositions identified for the PoL.

- The subcommittee included five KBE members and other education partners, including one postsecondary faculty member, a student and four representatives of the Kentucky Coalition for Advancing Education (KCAE). The four members from the coalition represented parents; business owners and community members; teachers; and school/district administrators.

The subcommittee collectively decided what a globally competitive student should know and be able to do when they graduate from high school in Kentucky. In October 2022, the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) approved a statewide PoL. This portrait represents an important promise to the children of Kentucky and communities in the Commonwealth.

Q. IS KENTUCKY’S PORTRAIT OF A LEARNER MANDATED OR REQUIRED FOR ALL DISTRICTS TO FOLLOW?

Prior to KBE approving Kentucky’s PoL, many districts had their own Portraits of a Learner or Graduate in place and others may have been considering or developing a local PoL or Graduate to meet the needs of their communities. The state’s PoL was developed and approved for districts to adopt as is or utilize as a starting point for a district to develop their own version customized to meet local needs.

Q. WHAT IS A COMPETENCY?

A competency is a term used to describe how students develop the specific knowledge, skills, and mindsets necessary for success in their academic, personal and professional lives. The concepts of knowledge, skills and mindsets are interconnected and essential components of a more holistic approach to learning. These concepts come together to form a defined competency.

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	MINDSETS
Knowledge is the essential information and concepts students acquire, forming the foundation for understanding, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, with an emphasis on mastering and applying content in real-life contexts.	Skills are the abilities students develop through practice and experience, encompassing both subject-specific and transferable skills, with a focus on applying skills in various contexts.	Mindsets are the attitudes and qualities that influence a student’s learning with an emphasis on nurturing positive traits to enhance overall development and competency achievement.

A PoL is made up of several competencies, which are measurable and observable. In education, competencies serve as the basis for designing curriculum, instruction and assessment, ensuring that students are well-equipped for success in academics, personal growth and future careers.

Q. WHAT ARE THE SIX COMPETENCIES IDENTIFIED IN KENTUCKY’S PORTRAIT OF A LEARNER?

The [six competencies of Kentucky’s Portrait of Learner](#) show us that student academic success matters, but so does a student’s ability to think critically and effectively communicate, while also being an empowered learner, productive collaborator, engaged citizen and creative contributor. By the time they graduate, a student should be:

- **A Critical Thinker:** Thinks deeply and makes informed decisions to create solutions or new understanding supported by relevant and reliable evidence.
- **An Effective Communicator:** Engages diverse audiences respectfully by exchanging ideas and information responsibly, listens actively, speaks and writes clearly, and uses print and digital media appropriately.
- **An Empowered Learner:** Demonstrates mastery and application of academic competencies. Develops the skills and dispositions to persist through difficulties and plan for a future of self-improvement.



- **A Productive Collaborator:** Engages with others to achieve a common goal through building positive relationships, actively listening, showing empathy and making individual contributions to a larger group.
- **An Engaged Citizen:** Shows respect and empathy across differences, embraces diversity of opinion, seeks cultural understanding, participates in the democratic process to challenge the status quo, and makes a positive impact on their community and the world.
- **A Creative Contributor:** Interprets experiences, imagines and plays with new possibilities with curiosity and creates approaches that are novel, useful and valued by the world around them.

Q. HOW DOES KENTUCKY’S PORTRAIT OF A LEARNER TIE INTO ASSESSMENT?

A benefit to having a statewide PoL – which features the competencies valued most by Kentuckians – is to use it as an anchor for a new, more balanced assessment and accountability system. This is a different approach than our current testing and accountability system, which uses high-stakes testing to determine student and school performance.

Assessments that support a PoL typically involve more than just memorizing facts or completing simple tasks. Examples of some of these types of assessments include:

- **Performance-based:** These assessments require students to demonstrate their understanding by applying their knowledge and skills in real-world situations. Examples include projects, presentations and group work.
- **Portfolios:** A collection of students’ work that showcases their learning progress over time, such as essays, research papers and creative projects. Portfolios help assess students’ ability to make connections and synthesize information across different subjects and experiences.
- **Open-ended questions:** Questions that do not have a single correct answer encourage students to think critically and creatively. They can be used in written assignments, discussions or exams.
- **Collaborative assessments:** Assessments that involve working in groups promote teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills. Examples include group projects, debates or case studies.
- **Self-assessments and reflection:** By reflecting on their learning process, students develop the skills to become more aware of their strengths and areas for improvement. This can involve journaling, goal setting or self-assessment checklists.
- **Peer assessments:** Providing feedback to classmates helps students learn from each other’s perspectives and promotes critical thinking and empathy.
- **Formative assessments:** Ongoing assessments, such as quizzes, assignments and in-class activities provide regular feedback and help students identify areas for improvement, deepening their learning and understanding.

Ultimately, a PoL drives better alignment among future employers, communities, higher education providers and families who depend on our schools to prepare students for their plans after high school.

Q. ONCE A PORTRAIT OF LEARNER IS ADOPTED BY A SCHOOL DISTRICT, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS?

- For most communities in the state, this will be the first time they truly hear and see the collective hopes, dreams and aspirations for Kentucky’s students expressed in tangible achievable terms.
- Parents and students should expect to see the identified skills woven into classroom learning experiences beginning in elementary school and reinforced until graduation.
- Parents and students can anticipate assessments that match the requirements of a changing, dynamic world rather than relying on end-of-grade and end-of-course testing alone. New assessments should assess the skills that prepare students for the workplace and civic engagement.