

HIGH SCHOOL FUTURES / A DISTRICT LEADERSHIP BRIEFING

HIGH SCHOOL SHOULD OPEN DOORS



**Next-generation assessment, extended transcripts,
and success data beyond graduation**

For superintendents, trustees, and senior cabinet leaders

A briefing for leaders shaping high school

This guide brings together policy reports, research, implementation guides, and perspectives shared by field leaders. Superintendents, board members, and senior cabinet members can use it to understand three developments in high school learning and identify a question worth examining in their district.

The central question

How can assessment innovation, extended transcripts and records of success help students use their learning, and help districts improve opportunities?

03–05 Understand the three areas

Shared definitions and the learner’s information problem.

06–21 Examine district choices

Examples, evidence, recognition, data, and implementation demands.

22–28 Choose a useful resource

What each source offers and how a leadership team might use it.

Three developments answer different district questions

The XQ Institute names these as Actions 8, 9, and 10 in its high school policy agenda. For district leaders, they concern different decisions. Assessment examines learning. A transcript communicates achievement. Success data describes patterns after students leave high school. Connecting their purposes is part of a wider effort to improve the high school experience.

Area	What it adds	District question
Next-generation assessment	Evidence of academic learning and broader competencies.	What can students explain or demonstrate?
Extended transcripts	A fuller record of achievement, evidence, and verification.	Can the next reader understand and use it?
Success data	Information about further education, progress, and work.	Where do students encounter barriers after graduation?

DIFFERENT INFORMATION, DIFFERENT USES

A learner’s record supports individual recognition and guidance. School-level outcome patterns support district inquiry. One does not automatically provide the other.

A transcript can leave achievement hard to see.



PERSPECTIVE

"If you asked [an older relative] to show you their transcript, it would probably look almost identical to a transcript of a senior in high school today."

Katie Jenner

Indiana Secretary of Education
Indiana Department of Education

A DISTRICT QUESTION

What achievement is hard to see in one of your own students' records? Ask counselors and receiving partners which additional evidence would help them interpret it.

Photo: Indiana Department of Education ·

Students need to see what comes next.

Secretary Jenner describes students nearing a credential without realizing it. The district question is where understanding breaks down: the record, the requirements, or the advising conversation. Students need to see what they have earned and what a next step would require. That inquiry may point toward clearer guidance, a better record, or a policy question to resolve.

Students need to know	A district can examine
What have I earned?	Whether the record communicates achievement clearly.
What remains?	Whether requirements and options are understandable.
Who can help?	Whether students can reach an adviser and practical support.

THE FIRST INQUIRY

Where does information stop becoming usable guidance?

Learning and recognition need to develop together.



PERSPECTIVE

“What would it take to ignite big change in the way we teach and learn and assess and importantly, credential this new kind of learning?”

Russlynn Ali

Chief Executive Officer and
Co-Founder
XQ Institute

Start with teaching and learning. Then design the evidence and its use.

THE DESIGN CHOICE

Which change in the learning experience would make a fuller record worth having? Let the intended student work shape the assessment and recognition design.

Photo: ASU+GSV Summit

Academic knowledge becomes visible through student work.

Imagine students developing a budget for a community event. They estimate demand, compare costs, and explain their assumptions. This extension of Ali's example gives mathematics a purpose. A curriculum team can examine whether the task reveals individual understanding, what feedback helps students revise, and how expectations compare across classrooms.



THE WORK TO EXAMINE

**Estimate demand.
Compare costs.
Test assumptions.
Explain the model.**

A CABINET TEAM CAN ASK

What would convince us that each learner understands the mathematics?

An engaging project still has to reveal the science.



PERSPECTIVE

Wallace describes biology standards and infectious-disease projects at Crosstown. Her account brings the conversation into the classroom: a compelling project needs a clear relationship to the knowledge students are learning.

Nikki Wallace

Science Teacher; Director of
Innovation & Research
Crosstown High

AN INSTRUCTIONAL QUESTION

Could teachers reviewing the same student work explain what it shows about biology? Examine their judgments and the time they need to reach shared expectations.

Photo: Crosstown High ·

Recognition depends on access to the learning.



PERSPECTIVE

Infante-Green describes an opportunity audit and the distance between students' aspirations and their access to courses and experiences. Alongside what students demonstrated, leaders should examine what schools made possible.

Angélica Infante-Green

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
Rhode Island Department of Education

AN OPPORTUNITY QUESTION

Who can take part in the experiences your district would recognize? Examine access to courses, transportation, accommodations, and adult support before extending the record.

Photo: National Assessment Governing Board

Assessment starts with a claim we can examine.

A claim such as “this student can interpret a linear model” needs evidence a teacher can examine. Broader skills need equally clear meaning. Ou Lydia Liu and colleagues’ skills-assessment paper examines why skill labels alone can be ambiguous. For district leaders, the question is whether a proposed assessment supports the particular instructional or recognition decision they intend to make.

Design question	Illustrative mathematics example
Claim	The learner interprets and compares linear models.
Evidence	A model, explanation, and justified revision.
Use	Feedback and a defensible next learning step.

BEFORE A NEW ASSESSMENT

Which interpretation do we need, and what evidence would make it dependable?

AI needs to strengthen the inferences educators make.

AI may help educators review work or propose feedback. A district still needs to know whether those uses produce sound inferences about learning. An initial review should let teachers examine errors, correct interpretations, and judge whether the tool saves useful time. It should also distinguish the learner’s contribution from permitted assistance.

The proposed use	Review work, propose feedback, or connect advising information.
The educator’s check	Show what evidence informed an inference and allow correction.
The district’s test	Examine errors, fairness, accessibility, and educator workload.

An exploratory use needs evidence of quality, fairness, and workable demands on staff.

A badge is useful when its achievement is clear.

XQ’s system organizes mathematical concepts and practices into 23 badges. The work behind recognition includes clear expectations, student revision, and educator review. The district guides make those demands visible. A cabinet team can use them to examine fit with its curriculum and grading practices, alongside the local rules governing course or graduation credit.

Behind a badge	What has to be clear
Learning	The mathematical concepts and practices.
Evidence	Work, revision, and sufficient demonstration.
Recognition	The reviewer, criteria, and permitted use.

[Explore XQ Math Badging](#)

An extended transcript can show more of the work.

XQ's report describes a bridge model at Fort Wayne's Amp Lab. Staff review student portfolios and award competencies or provide feedback. Courses and letter grades remain on the official transcript, while a supplementary record communicates competencies. This example gives district leaders a concrete design to examine: what additional achievement would a fuller record help a student communicate?



THE EQUITY QUESTION

Can learning from school, community, and family life meet clear evidence expectations?

A record gains value when a receiving partner uses it.

Consider how the community-event mathematics work might appear in a fuller record. A useful entry would identify the learning claim, evidence, and review process. The district and a receiving partner would still need to agree on its meaning for a particular decision. A portable file alone cannot establish that agreement.

ILLUSTRATIVE RECORD ENTRY

What the reader needs	What the entry could provide
Learning claim	Interprets and compares linear models for a budget.
Evidence	The model, explanation, and a justified revision.
Verification	Educator review against specified criteria.

THE RECEIVING DECISION

Would a college or training partner use this evidence for guidance, placement, or credit? What else would it require?

Guidance turns achievement into an informed next step.

Return to the student who cannot see how close a credential may be. A useful advising conversation connects achievement with remaining requirements and the student's priorities. District leaders can examine whether counselors have understandable information and the time to use it. Students also need help with the practical barriers that make an option difficult to pursue.



A USEFUL CONVERSATION

You have...
You still need...
You could choose...
We can help by...

THE DISTRICT CHECK

Can the student name a next action and the person who will help?

Graduation starts a transition districts can learn from.

Success data extends the district’s view beyond graduation. Enrollment, persistence, and completion can reveal where pathways need attention. Workforce information can add another perspective when the data support it. These measures should inform inquiry alongside students’ varied goals and experiences. XQ’s full success-data criterion includes public, school-level information on enrollment and progress, disaggregated by student group.

Look beyond the exit	Ask about the pathway
Enrollment	Where do students enter further learning?
Progress	Who persists and advances?
Completion	Who earns a credential or degree?
Work and wider purposes	What appropriate evidence captures varied goals?

A district needs clear definitions and data coverage before using outcome patterns to guide action.

Outcome differences give districts questions to investigate.

Outcome differences can identify a transition worth examining. District teams need clear cohorts and observation periods, sufficient coverage, and privacy protections. Compare groups responsibly, then investigate access, preparation, and support with people closest to the experience. A pattern can focus an inquiry without establishing why it occurred.

Understand coverage

Who is included, missing, or observed for too short a period?

Examine differences

Disaggregate responsibly and protect small groups.

Investigate explanations

Ask what access, support, and context may help explain the pattern.

A pattern gives the team a question. The inquiry needs evidence about its causes.

Success data matters when it informs a district response.

Infante-Green asks how data can lead to change. For a district team, that means connecting a pattern with a response someone can carry out. Edmund W. Gordon’s assessment argument and the Study Group skills paper reinforce this emphasis on inquiry. School-level success data and classroom evidence serve different decisions, but both require people who can act on what they learn.

District work	A concrete next step
Notice	Identify a transition or access pattern worth examining.
Investigate	Bring the question to students, educators, and partners.
Respond	Choose a feasible change and name who can carry it out.
Learn	Review what changed and what remains uncertain.

A proposed improvement sequence. Classroom evidence and school-level success data serve different decisions.

Educator time belongs in the design and budget.



PERSPECTIVE

Grieve describes the practical work behind school change: coaching, schedules, distributed leadership, investment, and coordination of work-based learning. Those conditions belong inside the proposal.

Jade Grieve

Former Chief of Student Pathways
NYC Public Schools

A BUDGET AND CAPACITY QUESTION

What time would educators and advisers need to review evidence and support students? A proposal should show what existing work it replaces, what it adds, and who will carry it.

Photo: ASU+GSV Summit

District choices depend on state and partner decisions.

Some questions concern local learning design. Others depend on state rules or the decisions of colleges and employers. A district proposal should make those dependencies visible. The map below is a starting point for discussion. Specific authority and approval processes need to be checked in the district’s own setting.

Who is involved	What the discussion should establish
District leadership	Learning design, educator time, advising, evidence review, and local data use.
State agencies and policy	Requirements and permissions affecting credit, assessment, records, and reporting.
Receiving partners	Which evidence they will consider for admission, placement, credit, or hiring.

A SHARED WORKING DOCUMENT

Name the decision, who has authority, what agreement is needed, and who will resolve each open question.

[Education Futures Council: a system design perspective](#)

An initial inquiry can make the trade-offs visible.

A superintendent could ask a cabinet team to examine one existing pathway with educators and students. The team would bring a task, a record, or a transition pattern and choose the relevant resources. Its first product could be a short options memo explaining the local problem, a feasible response, and the evidence needed for a decision.

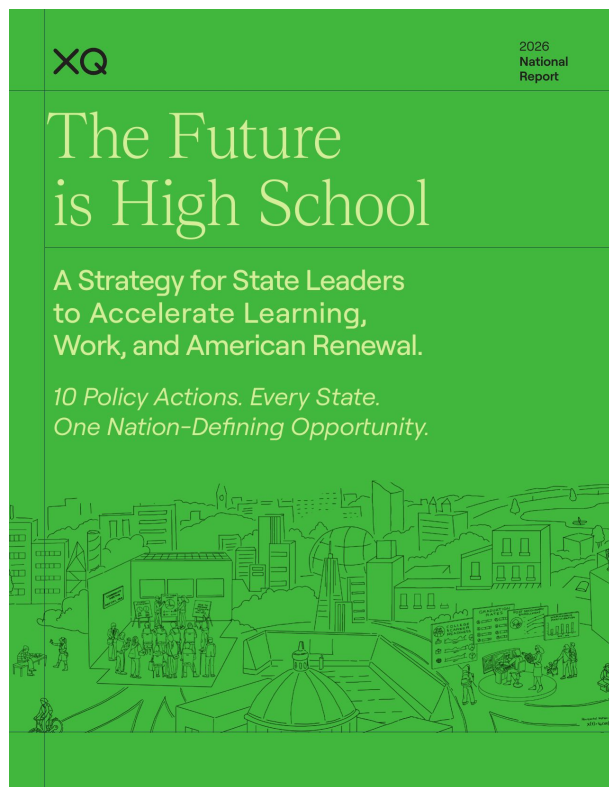
The memo would show	The question it would answer
The local problem	Who encounters it, and what evidence do we have?
A feasible response	What could change, who would act, and what time would it take?
A basis for deciding	What would we need to learn before proceeding or expanding?

THE FAIR CHALLENGE

Would this improve teaching or student options enough to justify the work it adds?

XQ connects these changes to a larger policy agenda.

The 2026 XQ National Policy Action Report places assessment, transcripts, and success data within ten actions for high school renewal. District leaders can use it to locate the policy conditions their own questions depend on, including mastery credit and educator development. Its criteria describe policy adoption. Local examination is still needed to understand how implementation reaches students.



START WITH THESE SECTIONS

8 Assessment
pp. 128–137

9 Redesigned transcripts
pp. 138–151

10 Success data
pp. 152–161

[Open XQ Policy in Action](#)

State policy is a starting point for district questions.

The Policy in Action website connects XQ's national framework with state profiles. A district team can use it to identify questions for its state agency and partners: what permission exists, what guidance is available, and what local conditions still need work? Record the edition and date when comparing policy status because the website and reports use different snapshots.

National policy framework

XQ framework. Use it to relate a local question to the wider policy agenda.

State progress

State profiles. Prepare questions about permission, guidance, and implementation support.

From permission to practice

Action 8 guidance. Connect assessment with mastery credit, competencies, and educator development.

The math badging guides make implementation work visible.

The XQ overview explains the math badging idea. The March 2026 state and district guides examine what it takes to use it. Together, they help a leadership team consider curriculum fit, educator review, revision opportunities, and recording practices before deciding whether a local exploration is worthwhile.

[XQ Math Badging overview](#)

Program overview. Clarify the unit of learning and the intended role of a badge.

[State leaders' implementation guide](#)

State guide. Identify permissions, preparation, and support that a district may depend on.

[District leaders' implementation guide](#)

District guide. Draft questions about grading, review time, revision, and portfolio processes.

ETS resources help leaders consider assessment claims.

These ETS resources address different parts of assessment development. They help leaders ask what a tool intends to measure, how its evidence supports that interpretation, and what remains under development. A curriculum or assessment team can use them to prepare questions for a proposed pilot or vendor conversation.

A New Vision for Skills-Based Assessment

Framework report. Clarify the intended skills and questions about their measurement.

Charting the Future of Assessments

Research report. Prepare questions about methods, evidence quality, and intended use.

Skills for the Future

Development initiative. Examine what has been designed, field tested, and validated.

The transcript resources show different design choices.

Aurora's cases and the Mastery Transcript introduction show ways to communicate achievement beyond familiar course-and-grade records. They can help district leaders compare designs with counselors and receiving institutions. The useful question is which additional information would support an actual decision, and who would agree to use it.

Going Beyond the Traditional

Aurora report. Compare credential designs and state cases with the district's own goals.

Mastery Transcript Consortium introduction

CompetencyWorks introduction. Examine how a reader encounters competencies and evidence.

XQ: redesigned transcripts

XQ policy guidance. Identify the partners and conditions needed for a useful record.

The data resources connect reporting with its possible uses.

These resources explain what education-to-workforce data can support and what its use requires. They offer different starting points for district research staff, cabinet members, and trustees. Use them to clarify the question, the available information, and who could act on a finding. Public reporting and individual guidance have different purposes.

[Data 101 · Data Quality Campaign](#)

DQC briefing. Establish shared language before asking for new data or a dashboard.

[Measurement for Mobility · Education Strategy Group](#)

Policy scan. Distinguish public reporting from accountability or funding decisions.

[The SLDS Landscape · Education Commission of the States](#)

ECS guide. Frame questions about governance, access, and the capacity to use data.

[Explore the ECS Data Systems collection](#)

The Study Group papers put learning at the center.

Edmund W. Gordon frames assessment as part of developing a learner's capability. Liu and colleagues examine skills, evidence, and the capacity to use insights. These papers give district leaders a foundation for asking how assessment can support teaching and learning. They are research-informed design contributions rather than evaluations of a complete district system.

CASE STUDY

Toward Assessment in the Service of Learning

Edmund W. Gordon



Purpose and learner variation

Edmund W. Gordon

CASE STUDY

A Skills-Based Vision for Assessment, Insight, and Educational Improvement

Ou Lydia Liu, Lei Liu, David Sherer,
and Paul G. LeMahieu



Skills, evidence, and use

Liu, Liu, Sherer, and LeMahieu

The next conversation can start with your students.

These resources offer a way to connect a vision for high school with questions your community can examine. The examples make new possibilities tangible. Your district's student work, records, and transition patterns will show where closer inquiry is worth the effort.

Superintendent

Which student opportunity should the district understand better?

Board of trustees

What evidence and resource implications would we need before changing policy or investment?

Senior cabinet

What can educators, students, and partners show us about the current experience?

A useful next step is one shared question, a relevant source, and a clear plan for gathering the evidence.