

Infuse Creativity in No Time

Whether in four minutes, four weeks,
or four years, bring creativity
to your school. [by Hannah Hudson](#)

Are you ready to bring more creative learning into your school? While the four C's—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication—will naturally fit into your school's existing curriculum, changing your school culture to emphasize these skills takes time and planning. The good news is that school leaders can get started in just a few minutes. Here are practical steps you can take—from four-minute activities to a four-year plan—that will transform your school into one that embraces 21st century skills.

4

What You Can Do in ... Four Minutes

In a school, every minute matters. In as little as four minutes, students can complete an activity that sparks creative thinking, and you can take the first step in enhancing your school's curriculum. Start by trying to break larger goals into smaller ones that can be accomplished at the beginning or end of class. Here are a few ideas.

Drop everything and create. Many schools set aside a few minutes each day to "Drop Everything and Read," a national program whose goal is to make reading a regular part of every day. In a similar fashion, Evergreen Mill Elementary School in Leesburg, Virginia, takes time to "Stop, Drop, and Create." During these sessions, everyone—students, teachers, and support staff—tackles a creative challenge such as drawing and naming an imaginary bug or making an underwater creature out of modeling clay. Focusing the entire school on a creative challenge is total collaboration. It's also a great way to build critical- and conceptual-thinking skills.

Start sketch journals. Just a few minutes a day of sketching and writing in a journal offers students an opportunity to reflect, make connections, and develop ideas. It's integral to the daily



routine at Montana's East Glacier Park Grade School, where students study the state's American Indian tribes all year long. Students respond to prompts that encourage them to link lessons to their own lives. When students study the environment in American Indian culture, for example, they also draw or write in their journals about a favorite outdoor place.

Make a phone call. You might be surprised just how much can be accomplished with one phone call. There are many arts organizations that will happily share their expertise. Look for ones in your area that can help enrich your school's existing curriculum. When educators at J.D. Hyatt P.S. 154 in the Bronx, New York, wanted to boost their character education program, they reached out to City Parks PuppetMobile. Soon all the students in the school had seen a professional puppet show and were on their way to making their own puppet shows about character education.

4

What You Can Do in ... Four Hours

Chances are, you already take the time for professional development days, field trips, and teacher planning. Take a closer look at how you can incorporate the four C's into those valuable hours. The following schools have the right idea.

Hold an inspiring workshop. Devote a professional development session to "Champion Creatively Alive Children" using the video series and trainers' guides available for free at www.crayola.com/creativelyalive and www.naesp.org/creativity. If you don't have four hours, divide the series into smaller bites; each video runs about four minutes and can stand alone. Also consider adding in hands-on exercises or group discussions for a 15-minute inspiration during a staff meeting or a parent-teacher evening.

Head outside and create. When creativity demands a change in scenery



from the usual classroom environment, the answer might be as simple as heading outside. At Monticello Intermediate School in Arkansas, each class worked together to build its own original clay castle on school grounds. When students returned to the classroom, they took the learning further using the castles as a basis for scientific observation and literacy connections. The time spent outdoors engaged in the arts laid the foundation for weeks of learning.

Have teachers team up. While whole-school collaboration might be your eventual goal, try sitting down with just a few teachers and brainstorming possibilities for collaborating across disciplines. It's a great start. For example, Flocktown/Kossmann Elementary School art teacher Melinda Hemberger collaborated with the school's fifth-grade team to teach students about the artist Mondrian in conjunction with their study in mathematics of the Cartesian plane. Teachers at the Long Valley, New Jersey, school found that students gained a deeper understanding of both subjects when they were taught concurrently.

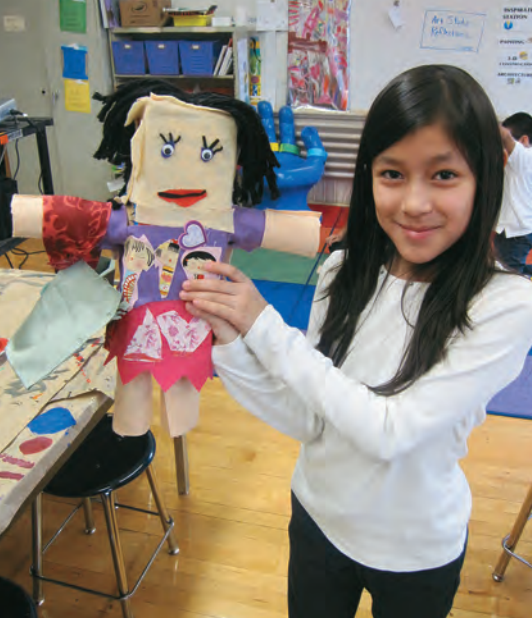
4

What You Can Do in ... Four Days

A week is long enough for students to complete a meaningful project or for you to roll out an initiative focused on the four C's. Take a look at your calendar as a whole and identify weeks that aren't full of other events or state testing. Then:

Lend a hand to the community.

Photos courtesy of Jonathan D. Hyatt P.S. 154, Bower Hill Elementary, Mitchell Elementary, and Estelle Elementary



This year, patients at the University of Maryland Children's Hospital will receive a special gift from the students at Norwood Elementary School in Baltimore County. The students made monster stuffed animals, which they called "cuddle creatures," and then wrote and illustrated stories about them. In addition to hospitals, nursing homes, community gardens, and food banks are great outlets for service learning.

Find a way to reach at-risk students.

Every student can benefit from the four C's, but if your school includes an at-risk population, consider following in the footsteps of the fourth- through sixth-grade teachers at Harriet Gifford Elementary School in Elgin, Illinois. These educators submitted the names of boys facing significant academic and social issues, who were then invited to join a special after-school club. In it, teachers promote teamwork, creativity, and cultural heritage as well as academic skills. The club meets weekly, and teachers report that many members have improved their math and reading scores. If the teachers at your school work together to identify the students in need of the most help, the groundwork for starting a similar club can be laid in less than a week.

Respond to a current event. Sometimes when an event happens in a school or community, the time to act is now. At Pennington Elementary School in Nashville, Tennessee, a devastating flood affected more than one-third of school families. Teachers responded by helping students overcome their fear

of rain by partnering with the city water works department to teach children where water goes and what protections are in place to prevent floods. The students' water works sketches combined art, science, technology, engineering, and math studies. Scrapbooks were also part of the project to help students deal with their emotions and restore memories lost by the floods.

To get your own project rolling, identify what you want students to do. Next, recruit volunteers to help gather supplies and serve as classroom assistants. Turn a community concern into a schoolwide shared experience.



What You Can Do in ... **Four Weeks**

As you move to changes that are implemented over weeks rather than hours or days, be sure to include teachers, parents, and community partners in the planning process. Try implementing several four-week projects in the first year of incorporating the four C's and more in the second year.

Paint a mural that matters. Murals are perennially favorite projects, but how do you keep them tied to the curriculum and not just a fun, decorative add-on? At Estelle Elementary School in Marrero, Louisiana, a mural was the culminating project for a schoolwide study of the BP oil spill and its effect on the Louisiana coastline. Students at every grade level worked in groups to paint ceramic tiles depicting what they had learned about the state's unique ecosystem. This process allowed more students to be involved than would have been had a mural been painted directly on a wall. In addition to current events, local history and culture can also be inspiration for a school mural.

Study art and science in nature. Perhaps the best way for students to learn about how plants grow and how caterpillars change is by immersing themselves in the sights and sounds of

a garden. At Bower Hill Elementary School in Venetia, Pennsylvania, students learned about the Impressionists and sharpened scientific observation skills through their study in an outdoor school garden filled with flowers, vegetables, and butterflies. Over the course of four weeks, children learned how to gather plant data, made careful observations, and applied what their garden taught them to art. If you don't have a school garden, consider visiting a community garden or park nearby.



What You Can Do in ... **Four Months**

In four months, you can make a change that flips traditional skill-and-drill learning on its head. The key is planning in advance and breaking out what will be done each month and who will be responsible for each step along the way. If you're new to the four C's, pick one big goal.

Complete a schoolwide project. When an entire school works to learn about a single topic, surprising connections emerge. Last fall at Oxford Elementary School in Oxford, Mississippi, students began a schoolwide study of artist Walter Anderson. Anderson was chosen because of his link to the region as well as his work as a visual artist, naturalist, writer, and traveler, which opened

up cross-curricular possibilities. Teachers across the grade levels incorporated Anderson into their lessons, everyone visited a local museum, and students collaborated on a mural in tribute to the artist. When looking for a subject for your school, think about what works for your curriculum at multiple grade levels. Where are the commonalities?

Have every student write a book.

Can you imagine if every student in your school was a published author? How would it change students' vision of themselves as readers, writers, and creators? At Orems Elementary School in Baltimore, educators set out to have all students publish their own books. The project was multifaceted. Teachers participated in workshops on bookmaking while working with students on drafting and revising original stories. In art class, students learned about different illustration styles. Students then published their stories using a variety of formats, from low-cost pamphlets to professionally bound books. The end result is that the students' books have joined those in the library for others to enjoy.

Bring students from different schools together. It's important to find other educators who share your commitment to arts education and the four C's. Collectively, you can work to influence policy, as well as bring students

together for exciting opportunities. Over the course of several months, kindergartners at Zane North Elementary School in Collingswood, New Jersey, worked with buddies at nearby Collingswood High School on a project about conquering their fears. Students at both levels read Maya Angelou's poem *Life Doesn't Frighten Me* and worked together to paint panels about personal superpowers. As the buddies took turns adding to their shared canvases, they learned about respectful collaboration and what it means to work in a creative partnership.



**What You Can Do in ...
Four Years**

Imagine where you and your teachers would like to see your school in four years. Do you see students using art to enrich the study of all subjects? Write down all of the ideas, big or small, then make a plan for getting there. Here's how:

Assess your current culture. The first step in forming a long-term plan related to the four C's is to assess your current school culture. What is the state of arts education in your school? What are the attitudes of administrators, parents, teachers, and kids toward creativity? How strong and widespread is the goal of integrating the arts across every subject of the school's curriculum? Meet with stakeholders and plan the change you would like to see. What steps will you and your faculty take and what initiatives will you lead to get to the ultimate "dream space" in four years?

Embrace project-based learning. If you want to use project-based assessment, map the progress

you would like to see during the next four years. A first goal might be to offer training for classroom teachers on how to infuse arts across the curriculum. Next, map out how to get parents involved and help them understand the value of project-based learning. Consider hosting a project fair or incorporating "family projects" that help parents to see how much their children learn from these experiences. You'll also want to plan how projects will eventually make up the majority of assessments rather than standardized tests.

Name a chief creative officer. Does the title of art teacher still fit when the job has been expanded to inspire colleagues' creativity? What would it mean if your art teacher became the "chief creative officer" who manages the infusion of creativity throughout your school? Think of a job description that includes supporting the creative endeavors of your faculty as well as students. It often takes years to make job description and responsibility changes official within school districts, so start now and map out your plan for this change over the next four years.

Principal Support

"When it comes down to it, [the success of arts education] has an awful lot to do with sustained leadership," said UCLA professor James S. Catterall, who has published leading studies on the impact of the arts on children. "Ultimately you need to have the principal's support for it to last. ... You also need a program that has visibility and becomes part of the school's conversation about children, teaching and learning."

Not every idea suggested here will be the right choice for your school. You'll need to consider your student population, budget, and the internal and external resources available. Make the best use of time by starting with smaller changes and working up to the bigger ones. In the end, you'll be amazed at what the four C's can do for your students' lives now and in the future. **□**

Hannah Hudson writes about education and parent issues.



Orems Elementary