

21st-Century-Skills Group to Move In With the Chiefs

By [Catherine Gewertz](#) on August 30, 2010 1:15 PM | [1 Comment](#) | [Recommend](#)

What does it mean that the Partnership for 21st Century Skills is moving in with the Council of Chief State School Officers? It's not entirely clear yet, but it's already sent folks in some quarters into alert mode.

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Let's take a second for a refresher on who's who. The [partnership](#), known to many as P21, is an organization that advocates the infusion of a broad range of skills such as collaboration, global awareness, and self-direction into a strong academic core of knowledge. (See its framework [here](#).) You might have heard debate about whether P21's approach cheats content in its focus on skills, and whether its agenda is [too business-driven](#).

The [CCSSO](#) is an advocacy group for the state's commissioners of education that has led many initiatives to improve schooling, including the recent campaign, with the National Governors Association, to develop [common academic standards](#). If you haven't been on an extended nap, you've undoubtedly heard debate about the common standards, notwithstanding their [adoption](#) by 36 states and the District of Columbia.

Ok, then. Last week, these two [announced](#) a new "strategic management relationship." It seems that P21 will remain an independent organization, but will move into the council's Washington offices and receive unspecified other "financial and human-resources management" support from the chiefs' group, beginning Dec. 1. This takes shape as P21 seeks new leadership, since its founding president, Tucson, Ariz.-based business executive Ken Kay, is stepping down.

[Common Core](#)'s Lynne Munson wondered [in her blog](#) what the CCSSO will get out of this. Others who, like Munson and her group, [push](#) to keep skills-development firmly rooted in deep content knowledge, took a more alarmist view of the P21-CCSSO deal. Both the Cato Institute's [Neal McCluskey](#) and the Pioneer Institute's [Jim Stergios](#) hear ominous notes in the arrangement.

Clearly, P21 and the CCSSO have harmonious outlooks on the world, or they wouldn't be co-habiting. P21 went out of its way to [commend](#) the release of the common standards back in June (though to be honest, so did tons of other people). The CCSSO cited the partnership's work in its recently released [teaching standards](#). Blogging about those standards for Teacher Beat, our own Stephen Sawchuk [noted](#) the presence of the 21st-century themes in the standards.

What all this means for the common standards—which, if implemented deeply, could be very influential in classrooms coast to coast—no one really knows yet. Ditto for the assessments being designed to gauge mastery of those standards. But in an e-mail that went out five days before the formal press release, P21's executive board told its supporters that it is excited about "taking the organization to its next level of influence" and "having a significant presence in D.C." by entering into this new relationship with the CCSSO. Both the e-mail and press release noted "synergy" between P21's work and CCSSO's, and singled out the common-standards initiative and the looming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as examples of shared views.

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