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OUR

REFERENCE GUIDE

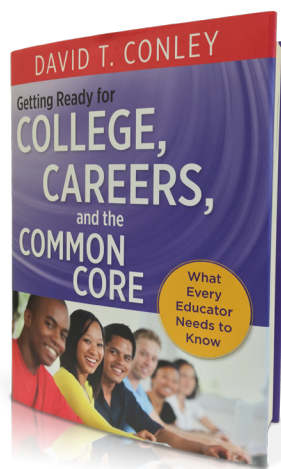
KEYS



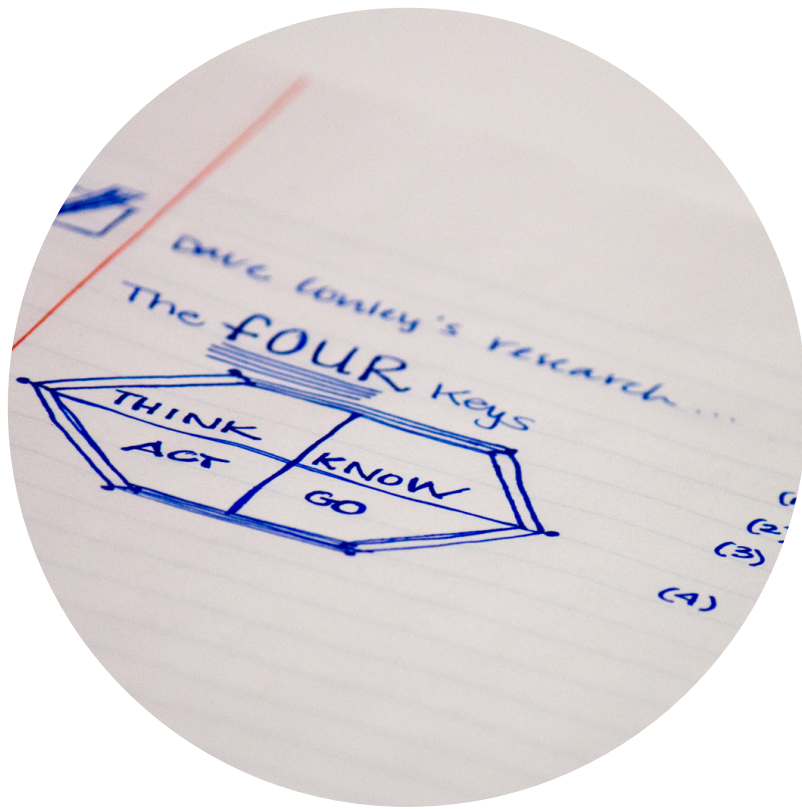
# Introduction

Many educators, families, and students are taking a hard look at the current educational system in the United States and finding there is a significant gap between what *is* and what *ought to be* if we want our country to succeed in the 21st century. The Four Keys to College and Career Readiness (the Four Keys) provides a framework and common language to use as we work to close this gap by developing systems that support all students as they prepare for the future.

Based on over a decade of research and 20 years of experience in the public education system, Dr. David T. Conley developed the Four Keys so students, families, and educators can identify and prioritize the skills that are needed to be successful after high school. In its simplest form, we refer to the Four Keys as THINK, KNOW, ACT, and GO. In order to prepare students to be lifelong learners, they need the ability to THINK deeply about what they are doing; KNOW contextually why they learn; ACT purposefully to achieve their goals; and GO successfully through life's transitions.

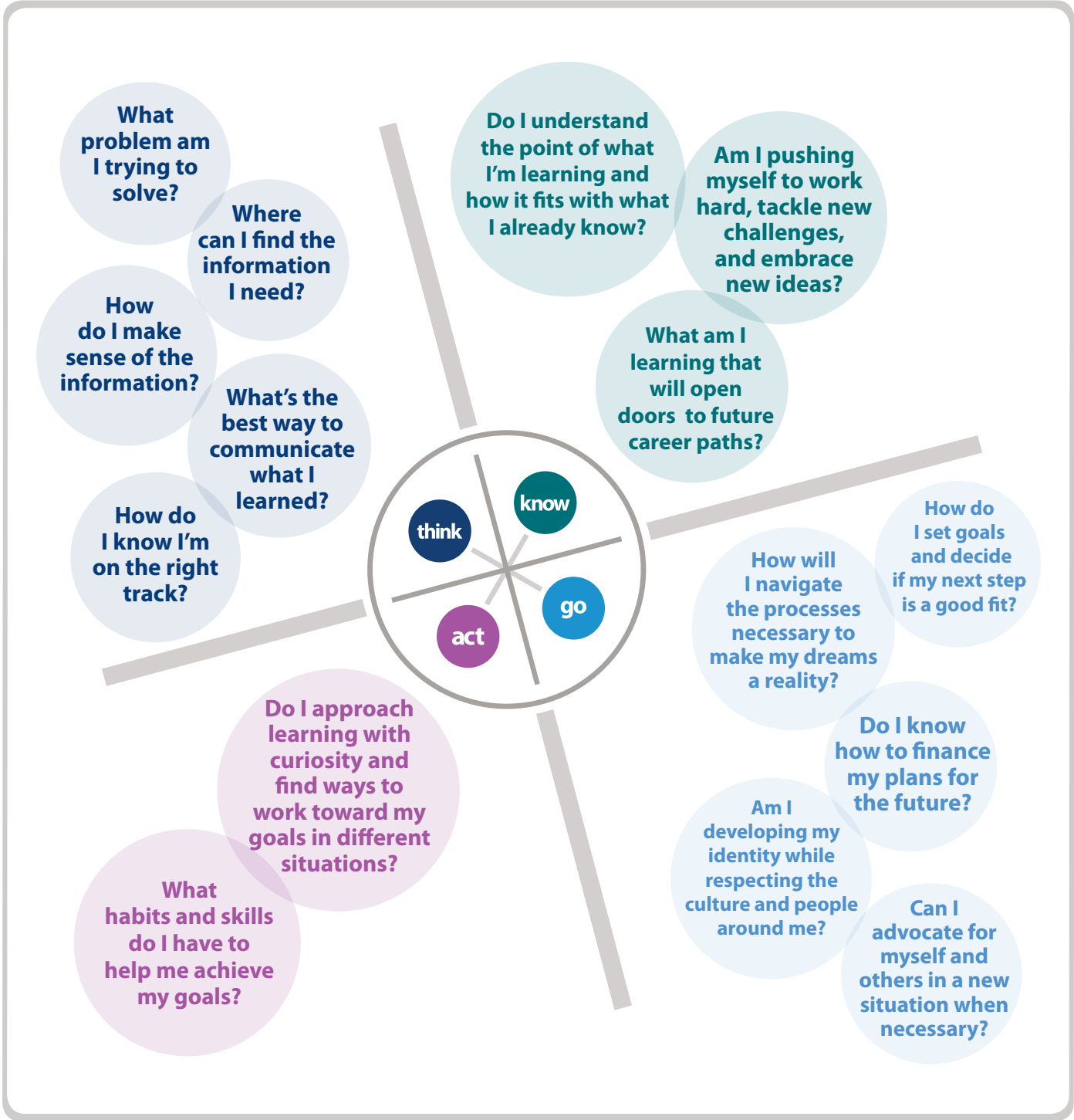


For more information about the research and the elements included in the Four Keys, read Dr. Conley's latest book ***Getting Ready for College, Careers, and the Common Core.***



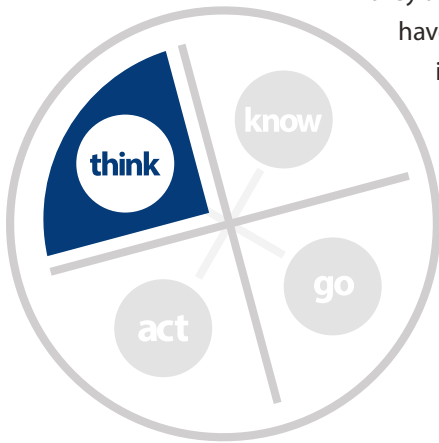
## ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Using the questions on the next page, we can begin to support students as they navigate pathways that are increasingly complex in their educations, careers, and personal lives. The Four Keys are not a linear process, but instead should be thought of as a set of skills and strategies that can be used to better understand how we learn, as well as a framework for approaching new concepts and situations we encounter as we interact with the world around us.



# Think

What does it mean for a student to think deeply about what and how he or she is learning? Similar to the scientific method, we lay out a set of strategies that are typically used by effective problem solvers. As stated in *Getting Ready for College, Careers, and the Common Core*, students “need to know how to think in particular ways about the content they are learning. They need to be able to do more than retain or apply information; they have to process and manipulate it, assemble it and reassemble it, examine it, question it, look for patterns in it, organize it, and present it.”



By asking and answering a series of questions when approaching new learning situations, students can more effectively determine solutions to the challenges they are faced with. Called the *Key Cognitive Strategies* in Dr. Conley’s book, we have simplified the language so students, families, and educators can regularly use these questions to guide students’ thinking. These questions are:

- *What problem am I trying to solve?*
- *Where can I find the information I need?*
- *How do I make sense of the information?*
- *What’s the best way to communicate what I learned?*
- *How do I know I’m on the right track?*

As students develop strategies to address these questions, they will obtain the skills needed to creatively and innovatively solve challenges they encounter in their education after high school, in their careers, and in their day-to-day life. Not only will students gain these important skills, but they will also understand why and how these strategies help them approach new challenges in an organized way– they will know how to problem solve and they will understand why these problem solving strategies are effective.



*“These strategies are applied throughout the learning process and can be thought of as revolving around the notion of inquiry, of thinking more deeply about what one is learning, of formulating ideas, seeking information, reflecting on findings to generate conclusions, reporting these results in a variety of ways based on the nature of the subject area, and doing all of this with the precision and accuracy required of the subject area and the specific problem or issue being addressed.”*

**– Dr. David Conley**  
*Getting Ready for College, Career, and the Common Core*

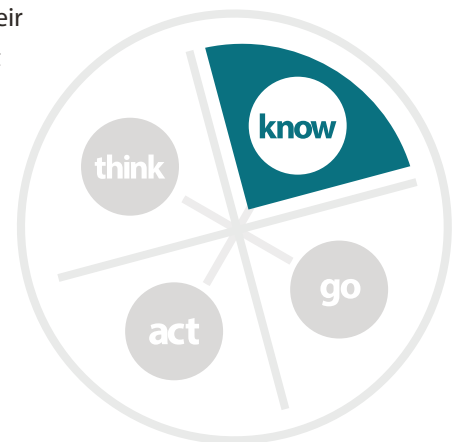
# Know

Within the THINK, KNOW, ACT, GO framework, KNOW has historically been the most emphasized in the U.S. education system with a focus on teaching and testing students' specific academic knowledge such as English and mathematics. This focus on content without systematically teaching the other skills and techniques needed to be a successful learner has created a system with a skewed definition of what student success looks like. While students certainly need foundational knowledge to succeed after high school, those foundations will only be useful if they have the ability to contextualize their knowledge and understand how and when to use it. This is why within the Four Keys framework KNOW is only one quarter of the model.

With rapid changes to the global economy and immediate access to information, the workforce of the 21st century will not be able to absorb and retain all the knowledge needed to succeed in their careers, but will instead need to know how to continually learn important concepts and facts effectively and efficiently. Once again, taking the research and details Dr. Conley describes in his latest book as *Key Content Knowledge*, we have developed a series of questions to prompt students to continually reflect on why, what, and how they are learning new content:

- *Do I understand the point of what I'm learning and how it fits with what I already know?*
- *Am I pushing myself to work hard, tackle new challenges, and embrace new ideas?*
- *What am I learning that will open doors to future career paths?*

As students use these questions to connect what they are learning to their future, their time in the classroom can become something that feels more relevant instead of just something they are required to do. Adults who support student learning should make it a habit to examine the way information is communicated to students. Are students being taught in a way that allows them to ask these questions each day? Are subjects within a school taught so that students see the connections between them? Is the content taught being explicitly connected to how and when it is needed in specific careers and/or industries? And maybe most importantly, are students regularly given the opportunity to learn based on their own curiosity and interests?



*"It is not enough to have students learn high-quality content knowledge, even when that knowledge is carefully organized, structured, and presented clearly. Understanding student explanations of how they learn content knowledge is as important as the content itself they are being asked to learn."*

**– Dr. David Conley**

*Getting Ready for College, Career, and the Common Core*

# Act



Employers consistently say that skills and competencies such as the ones described in ACT are just as important– if not more important – than the specific qualifications and skills employees need to do their jobs. To more explicitly link the knowledge and skills students need to their potential future career paths, we recently reviewed desired employee competencies from an organization internationally renowned for its innovative design, and mapped them to the Four Keys. A large portion of these competencies were skills that fit within the ACT quadrant. Examples of the ACT-aligned competencies included the abilities to: be proactive in seeking information; be organized; be goal-oriented; collaborate often; and be able to embrace diversity of people, ideas, and cultures.

Based on what Dr. Conley has identified as *Key Learning Skills and Techniques*, we ask two questions that effective learners should consider as they navigate their college and career pathways:

- *Do I approach learning with curiosity and find ways to work towards my goals in different situations?*
- *What habits and skills do I have to help me achieve my goals?*

When the skills and techniques students need to “own” their learning and to accomplish goals are consistently incorporated with content taught in the classroom, students are able to better identify answers to these questions, particularly if they are given ways to monitor their progress in gaining and/or refining these skills. At the same time, it is also important for educators and families to help students identify how they acquire these skills through their life experiences outside of the classroom. Whether it is through school clubs, athletics, performing arts, or responsibilities within their families such as caring for younger siblings or navigating systems for a parent whose first language is not English, students often learn skills that will be valuable for college and careers. How can we work together to find more systematic ways to support students so they can identify the ways they learn life-readiness skills both inside and outside of school?

*“The key learning skills and techniques comprise a series of elements that specify how students can take greater ownership of their learning and another set of teachable skills that enable students to learn more efficiently and effectively. Success in postsecondary education and job training programs is contingent on learners being able to learn with greater independence and efficiency.”*

**– Dr. David Conley**  
*Getting Ready for College, Career, and the Common Core*

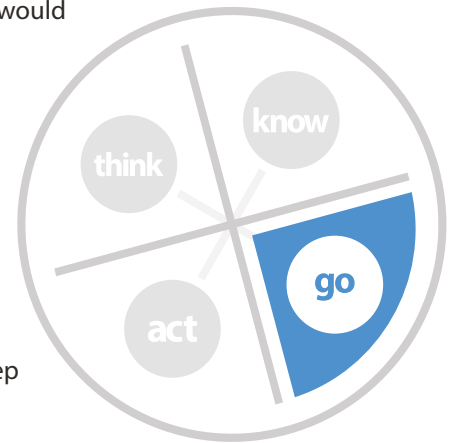


# Go

Transitions are difficult. There is complexity in understanding a new set of unspoken expectations, navigating unfamiliar systems, figuring out how to maintain a sense of self, and at the same time remaining open to learning about how others approach the world around them. Students need to be able to do all these things as they leave high school, but also as they transition from elementary to middle school, from middle to high school, from postsecondary education to careers, when starting new friendships/relationships, moving to a new town, starting a new job, etc. The questions below are based on Dr. Conley's *Key Transition Knowledge and Skills* and address many of the areas that adults continue to work on improving throughout their lives:

- *How do I set goals and decide if my next step is a good fit?*
- *How will I navigate the processes necessary to make my dreams a reality?*
- *Do I know how to finance my plans for the future?*
- *Am I developing my identity while respecting the culture and people around me?*
- *Can I advocate for myself and others in a new situation when necessary?*

Imagine how powerful it would be if students had the opportunity to develop these skills systematically from the beginning of their school experience. In what ways would it transform how students learn, and also how our culture and society approach opportunities and conflicts? By equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to approach new environments with purpose and also with understanding and respect for others in the environment, we are doing more than simply transforming how students learn. We have the potential to influence how our culture and society approaches opportunities and conflicts as we navigate these transitions together. We also have the opportunity to teach students how to avoid costly financial and emotional mistakes that can occur when we go through transitions without fully understanding if our next step is a good fit with our overall life goals.



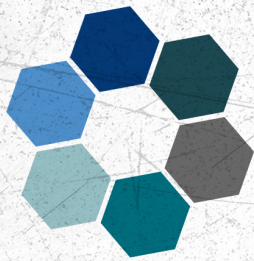
*“They [students] need to understand more about college and career readiness than knowing they need to take courses with particular titles. They need to grasp the significance of the fact that they are about to embark on a life transition, one of the most significant and wrenching transitions they will ever face. Most students are not aware of the scope, scale, or severity of this transition.”*

**– Dr. David Conley**

*Getting Ready for College, Career, and the Common Core*

know

think



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partnerships  
empowering students for college and career

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