



PARTNERSHIP FOR
21ST CENTURY SKILLS

Beyond the Three Rs: Preparing U.S. Students for a Global Workforce

Summary

A new, nationwide poll of registered voters reveals that Americans are deeply concerned that the United States is not preparing young people with the skills they need to compete in the global economy. The findings indicate that Americans understand that the economy has changed and that, without skills that reflect today's workforce demands, young people may face tougher challenges earning a living wage and maintaining U.S. competitiveness than previous generations did.

Key Findings

- *There is near universal agreement (99%) that teaching 21st century skills is important to our country's future economic success.*
- *Voters are clear: We are living in a different era that requires new thinking in our approach to educating our youth.*
 - 80 percent of voters say the things students need to learn today are different than 20 years ago.
 - Six in 10 voters say our schools are not keeping pace with changing educational needs.
- *Voters applaud schools for the manner in which they have embraced computer skills and technology, and have incorporated these skills into the classroom.*
 - But, there are skills areas voters believe are critically important in the 21st century that are not being taught well in our schools today.
 - These include 21st century skills such as critical thinking, ethics and social responsibility, teamwork and communications skills.
- *While expressing strong support for 21st century skills, voters are not backing away from traditional, basic skills such as reading, math and science.*
 - Reading comprehension ranks highest in importance among voters polled.
 - Americans seem to recognize that literacy remains a fundamental gateway skill for learning core academic content, acquiring 21st century skills and performing on the job.
 - At the same time, voter attitudes clearly have shifted away from the "back to basics" movement that was a strong theme for school improvement during the 1990s.
- *But voters want more than just the basic skills taught in our schools.*
 - Two-thirds (66%) of voters say we need to incorporate a broader range of skills in our curriculum.
 - Nearly eight in ten voters (78%) want there to be at least an equal balance between basic skills and 21st century skills.

- Almost nine in 10 voters (88%) believe 21st century skills can and should be part of the curriculum.
- Voters expressed support for a broad range of 21st century skills and they shared their assessment of how well schools are doing now in teaching these skills:

	Percentage of voters who rank this skill as a 9 or 10 in importance on a scale of 0 to 10	Percentage of voters who give schools a 9 or 10 in teaching this skill on a scale of 0 to 10
Reading comprehension	75 percent	10 percent
Computer and technology skills	71 percent	25 percent
Critical thinking and problem solving skills	69 percent	6 percent
Ethics and social responsibility	62 percent	5 percent
Written communications	58 percent	5 percent
Teamwork and collaboration	57 percent	9 percent
Oral communications	56 percent	6 percent
Lifelong learning and self-direction	50 percent	5 percent
Mathematics (algebra, geometry and trigonometry)	48 percent	13 percent
Leadership	44 percent	6 percent
Creativity and innovation	43 percent	5 percent
Media literacy	42 percent	6 percent
Global awareness	42 percent	6 percent
Science (biology, chemistry and physics)	38 percent	7 percent

About the survey: Public Opinion Strategies and Peter D. Hart Research Associates conducted this national survey of 800 registered voters from September 10-12, 2007. The survey has a margin of error of $\pm 3.46\%$.

About the Partnership for 21st Century Skills: The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has emerged as the leading advocacy organization focused on infusing 21st century skills into education. The organization brings together the business community, education leaders and policymakers to define a powerful vision for 21st century education to ensure every child's success as citizens and workers in the 21st century. The Partnership encourages schools, districts and states to advocate for the infusion of 21st century skills into education and provides tools and resources to help facilitate and drive change. Visit us on the web for more information: www.21stcenturyskills.org.

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