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Report: Retool instruction, or U.S. will fail

U.S. schools must teach 21st-century skills for the nation to be globally competitive, it says

From eSchool News staff and wire service reports

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Creating a 21st-century education system that prepares students, workers, and citizens to triumph in the global skills race is the central economic competitiveness issue currently facing the United States, according to a new report from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). The report provides a sobering wake-up call for the nation's civic and education leaders.

The report, called "21st Century Skills, Education, and Competitiveness," argues that for the United States to be globally competitive--and for states to attract growth industries and create jobs--the nation requires a fresh approach to education that recognizes the critical role 21st-century skills play in the workplace.

The report summarizes the challenges and opportunities that, if left unaddressed, would curtail U.S. competitiveness and diminish the nation's standing in the world economy. It urges policy makers and leaders in business, education, and workforce development to use the report as a resource for shaping policies that are attuned to competitive needs.

"We need to recognize that a 21st-century education is the bedrock of competitiveness--the engine, not simply an input, of the economy," the report says.

It notes that the country's economic output has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, and there is no sign this trend will stop.

In 1967, the production of material goods (such as cars and equipment) and the delivery of material services (such as transportation and construction) accounted for nearly 54 percent of the country's economic output. However, by 1997, the development of information products (such as computers) and the delivery of information services (such as financial and broadcast services) accounted for 63 percent of the country's output.

As the world continues to shift from an industrial economy to a service economy driven by information, knowledge, and innovation, cultivating 21st-century skills is vital to economic success, the report states.

While the global economy has been changing, the United States has focused primarily on closing domestic achievement gaps and largely has ignored the growing necessity of graduating students capable of filling emerging job sectors, according to the report.

And while focusing nationally on closing achievement gaps between the lowest and highest performing students has been a legitimate and useful agenda, the report asserts that this goal has skirted the competitive demand for advanced skills.

"Equally important to the domestic achievement gap is the global achievement gap between U.S. students--even top performers--and their international counterparts," said Paige Kuni, worldwide manager of K-12 education for Intel Corp. and P21 chair.

"Quite simply, for the United States to stay economically viable and remain a world leader, the country must make closing all achievement gaps a national priority."

Abroad, developed and competing nations have focused on imparting a different set of skills--21st-century skills--to their graduates, because these skills increasingly power the wealth of nations, the report says. Furthermore, businesses now require workers who can handle more responsibility and contribute more to productivity and innovation. In fact, from 1995 to 2005, the United States lost three million manufacturing jobs, but, during that same time, 17 million service-sector jobs were created. It is critical that the United States graduate students capable of filling those jobs and keeping pace with the change in skill demands, the report warns.

"It has become apparent that there isn't a lack of employees who are technically proficient, but a lack of employees who can adequately communicate and collaborate, innovate, and think critically," said Ken Kay, P21 president.

"At this pivotal moment in our nation's history, legislators and policy makers must focus on the outcomes we know produce graduates capable of competing in the 21st century and forging a viable economic future."

The report says every aspect of the U.S. education system--from pre-kindergarten to postsecondary and adult education, including after-school and teacher preparation programs--"must be aligned to prepare citizens with the 21st-century skills they need to compete."

It encourages U.S. schools to do a better job of teaching and measuring advanced, 21st-century skills beyond simply assessing science, reading, and math. In addition, it outlines several actions at the national, state, and local levels that U.S. leaders must undertake to improve economic results and better prepare citizens to participate in the 21st-century economy.

"All Americans, not just an elite few, need 21st-century skills that will increase their marketability, employability, and readiness for citizenship," the report says. These skills include critical thinking and judgment, complex problem solving, creative thinking, and communication and collaboration.

P21 is a national advocacy group focused on infusing 21st-century skills into education. The report is sponsored by the Ford Motor Company Fund, KnowledgeWorks Foundation, and the National Education Association.

Link:

["21st Century Skills, Education, and Competitiveness"](#)

Note to readers:

*Don't forget to visit the " **Creating the 21st Century Classroom** "resource center. Preparing today's youth to succeed in the digital economy requires a new kind of teaching and learning. Skills such as global literacy, computer literacy, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation have become critical in today's increasingly interconnected workforce and society--and technology is the catalyst for bringing these changes into the classroom. Go to [Creating-the-21st-century-classroom](#)*

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eSchoolNews

7920 Norfolk Ave, Suite 900, Bethesda Maryland, 20814

Tel. (866) 394-0115, Fax. (301) 913-0119

Web: <http://www.eschoolnews.com>, Email: WebAdmin@eschoolnews.com