

21st Century Literacy Survey Summary

The New Reality: Basic Skills Plus for All

In May 2003, Lake Snell Perry & Associates and Market Strategies designed and administered a telephone survey, sponsored by the AOL Time Warner Foundation to 1200 adults ages 18 or older to capture their opinions about what skills teens need for the 21st Century and where and how they should acquire them. In addition, they oversampled 150 teachers and 150 business executives. Eight focus groups were also held. Here is a summary of the results:

Are 21st Century Literacy skills important? *Absolutely.* There is a great deal of consensus among the public about 21st Century skills – including the need for young people to learn these skills and concern that they are not being adequately taught.

WHAT are 21st century skills? *The basics (reading, writing, math) plus* technology, communications, critical thinking, adaptability, decision-making and problem solving skills define the new minimum. Collaboration, teamwork, tolerance are also seen as important skills, followed by creativity, civic engagement and global citizenship.

Are young people getting these skills? *Not enough of them.* Americans see reading, writing and math as being learned by a majority of students, and to a lesser degree they believe that technology skills are being learned. However, a majority think other important 21st Century skills, like communication, problem solving, critical thinking and decision making are not being learned by young people.

What are the obstacles to getting 21st Century Literacy Skills. *Funding and flexibility.* Respondents, especially teachers, cite lack of funding and lack of curriculum flexibility as the primary reasons these skills are not taught. Others, particularly business executives, add lack of teacher training to the list.

WHERE should young people learn these skills? *In school and at home.* Three quarters of the respondents gave parents the highest rating for 21st century literacy skill building. Schools, including institutions of higher learning, were next. Religious institutions, after-school and summer programs were also viewed as important sources.

How should young people get these skills? *By making the skills a vital part of learning.* Respondents were strongly in favor of challenging schools to integrate these skills into the curriculum, add them to school curriculum standards and offer them in all classes. They also favored providing all young people with access to high quality after-school and summer programs, and building the teaching of these skills into programs outside of normal school hours.

WHY are these skills needed? *To open doors for teens, give them new horizons, prepare them for a changing world.* In short, Americans believe that teens need “**The Basics Plus.**”