

Beyond the Three Rs

Voter Attitudes toward 21st Century Skills



PARTNERSHIP FOR
21ST CENTURY SKILLS

A 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 percent) 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.

- There are other skills areas voters believe are critically important in the 21st century, such as critical thinking, ethics and social responsibility, teamwork and communications, which are not being taught well in our schools today.

While expressing strong support for 21st century skills, voters are not backing away from traditional, basic skills such as reading, math and science. But voters want more than just basic skills taught.

- Reading comprehension, a fundamental gateway skill, ranks highest in importance among voters polled.
- 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.
- Almost nine in 10 voters (88 percent) believe 21st century skills can and should be part of the curriculum.

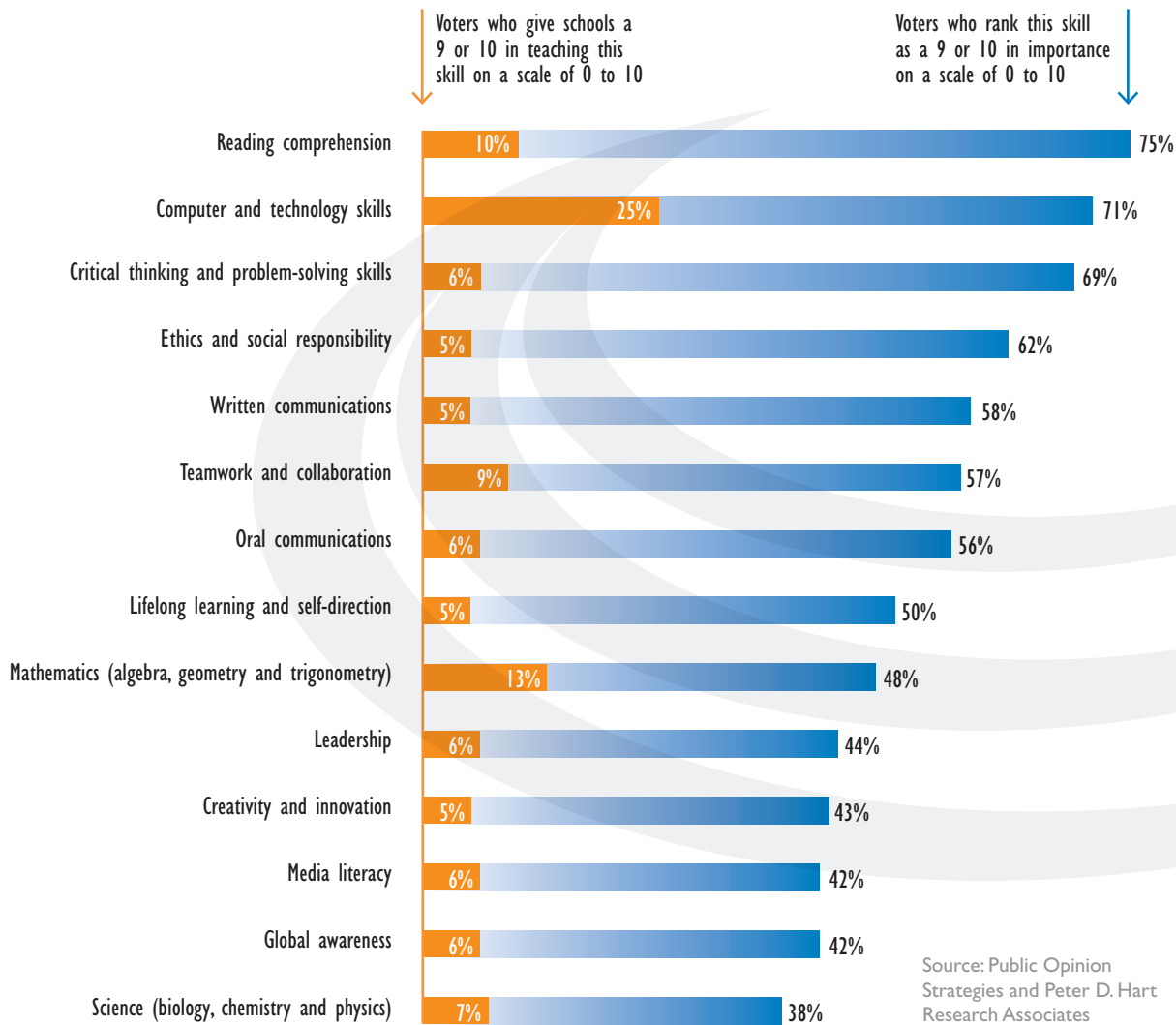
Implications

It is rare in a poll of voters to discover an issue upon which virtually all Americans agree. This poll reveals undivided, even fervent, support for incorporating 21st century skills into teaching and learning in the nation's schools.

Schools have a critical role to play in teaching 21st century skills. But changing the direction, nature and results of schooling on a grand scale is beyond the capacity of local schools alone. These findings now offer federal, state and local policymakers a tremendous opportunity to make the U.S. education system more robust, rigorous and relevant for students. Without a doubt, the nation is behind them.



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:



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 ± 3.46%.

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP FOR 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is 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.

To help education leaders implement 21st century teaching and learning, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills recently developed Route 21, an online, one-stop shop for 21st century skills-related resources, such as high-quality content, best practices and research.

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