

Bringing our Schools into the 21st Century

The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, a high-powered, bipartisan assembly of Education Secretaries, business leaders and a former Governor released a blueprint in 2007 for rethinking American education from pre-K to 12 and beyond to prepare students to thrive in the global economy. Today's economy demands not only a high-level competence in the traditional academic disciplines but also in the following 21st century skills:

- ***Knowing more about the world***

We need workers who are “global trade literate, sensitive to foreign cultures, conversant in different languages”
(Mike Eskew, CEO of UPS.)

- ***Thinking outside the box***

Kids must learn to think across disciplines, since that's where most new breakthroughs are made. It's interdisciplinary combinations—design and technology, mathematics and art—“that produce YouTube and Google.”
(Thomas Friedman in *The World is Flat*.)

- ***Becoming smarter about new sources of information***

Kids need to rapidly process what's coming at them and distinguish between what's reliable and what isn't. “It's important that students know how to manage it, interpret it, validate it, and how to act on it.”
(Dell Karen Bruett, from the board of Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a group of corporate and education leaders focused on upgrading American education.)

- ***Developing good people skills***

Emotional Intelligence is as important as IQ for success in today's workplace. “Most innovations today involve large teams of people. We have to emphasize communication skills, the ability to work in teams and with people from different cultures.”
(Former Lockheed CEO Martin Norman Augustine.)

This article can be accessed at:

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1568429,00.html>

Looking at Social Studies

Social Studies—What is its purpose in a global world?

- What knowledge is most important?
- What understandings will endure?
- What do we want students to learn—the “Big Ideas”?
- What are the big ideas that will last beyond the classroom?
- To what extent do the ideas require an explanation of the abstract?

Social Studies—Questions to Explore: What is the meaning of:

- Citizenship participation
- Living in a democracy
- Understanding and appreciating cultural diversity and religion
- Understanding history’s turning points—U.S. and global events
- Understanding the role of technology in shaping the 21st century

Social Studies—Answering Specific Questions: Ways People Govern Themselves:

- Totalitarianism
- Imperialism
- Socialism
- Communism
- Fascism
- Democracy

Social Studies—Developing Skills to:

- Participate in groups—cooperative learning; peer interactions
- Dialog, listen, and discuss historical and current events, literature, and the arts
- Perform dramatic enactments of historical events and literary passages
- Role play and act out the meaning of words
- Debate, discuss, and develop multiple perspectives
- Write journals, tackle more than one side, and support positions with evidence
- Analyze bias and spin in media and advertising, and historical inaccuracy in films
- Assess, reflect and ask questions

Social Studies—Developing Diverse Assessment Strategies

- Student choices—portfolios, multimedia presentations, etc.
- Create class plays—have students write it themselves.
- Create class films—have students write the scripts themselves:
Lights! Camera! Action!
- Create panel discussions—have students debate the issues: *You are there!*