

# 21st Century Skills

## Getting There From Here

After reading this publication, it will seem obvious that schools need to embrace 21st century skills. Yet the very nature of institutions such as schools is to maintain the status quo. Don't be surprised when others don't immediately see the urgency of incorporating the new thinking reflected here.

Consider using the process on the following page as a way to bring 21st century skills into your school. As you do:

**Stay Focused:** Remember, the goal is to ensure that our students are able to thrive in the Digital Age. Getting there from here will take commitment, perseverance, hard work, and careful analysis of whether your strategies and tactics are contributing to that goal.

**Take on Something Doable:** Don't try to implement all of the 21st century skills at once. Bring them into the mainstream of standards-based learning and academic achievement, cluster-by-cluster, skill-by-skill. Identify a couple of skills that you know will resonate with your school and community. Build from there.

**Build Bridges:** Advocate the use of common sense, logic, statistics, insights from the business community, humor, and other tactics to create a sense of urgency for your 21st century skills. In this age of high-stakes assessment, it will be necessary to build a bridge between the 21st century skills and the high academic achievement that is first and foremost in teachers' and administrators' minds. Do your homework. Build a strong bridge—convince others that the 21st century skills can add to students' viability in this knowledge-based, global society.

**Honor and Extend Existing Work:** Chances are some, if not all, of the 21st century skills are being at least partially addressed by innovative teachers in your school or community. Build on that work by helping those educators to be more explicit and purposeful in addressing such skills, adding missing components such as assessments. Where the 21st century skills are not being addressed, help teachers to build them—along with effective uses of technology—into existing lessons. Go slowly—appeal to teachers' natural inclination to do what is right for students.

**Make Decisions at the System Level:** Don't expect teachers to make individual decisions to incorporate 21st century skills into their classrooms until the school district has made a formal commitment to doing so. In this high-stakes testing environment, it is just too risky for individual teachers to dedicate instructional time to ideas not yet sanctioned by the school system. Commit to the concept at the system level; collaboratively build and align curriculum, instruction, and assessment to the 21st century skills; and create a culture of openness, support, and reward work toward that innovation.

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