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## 21st century skills

By The Denver Post

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*"Colorado's greatest challenge to remain competitive is its future workforce. A knowledge-based economy cannot flourish without an education system that consistently produces high-quality graduates with skills that offer the greatest potential for employment."*

- "Toward a More Competitive Colorado," Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation report

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that today's students will have 10-14 jobs by the age of 38. Thirty or 40 years ago, we knew the kinds of jobs our students would have. Today, we are preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist.

How do teachers deal with the challenges of the 21st century? How do we prepare our students to be successful citizens in the rapidly changing world we live in? How do we produce "high-quality graduates with skills that offer the greatest potential for employment?"

Despite the considerable work that has been done to raise academic expectations, implement standards and assessments, and increase accountability, our educational system in this country is still primarily a 20th century system. The demands of the 21st century require us to examine our schools and our expectations for students and revamp both to meet the challenges of a global economy.

In order to succeed in school, work and life in the 21st century, our students need 21st century skills. The core subjects we all learned in school - reading, English, math, science, foreign languages, the arts, civics, government, history, economics and geography - must be expanded to include 21st century subjects such as global awareness, civic literacy, health and wellness, and financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy. Information and communications technology literacy is as necessary to today's students and tomorrow's workers as English, math and science.

Beyond these academic content areas is a whole array of other skills essential to success in the 21st century. Never has it been more important for schools to develop life-long learners. Learning and thinking skills include critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and innovation, collaboration, and information and media literacy.

Finally, we need to systematically foster life skills in our students. Good teachers have always incorporated these skills into their teaching. Today we must deliberately and strategically instill these skills throughout the educational process. Life skills include: leadership, ethics, accountability, personal and social responsibility, adaptability, personal productivity and self-direction.

These skills make up a unified, collective vision for education in the 21st century. Unlike many of the recent reports on American education, we do not believe turning our schools inside out is the answer. There are no startling suggestions here such as ending high school at 10th grade and channeling 15- and 16-year-olds into career tracks.

We don't need to reform our schools. We need to build on the successes of our 20th century school system, which for many years produced the best and most highly educated workers in the world. Our schools are not failing; rather, the times are changing so rapidly that our schools can't keep up. We must adapt and advance our education system or the world will leave us behind. There's no time to start over with new, untested reforms.

Implementing these 21st century skills can begin right now in our current schools, although it will require a significant upgrading of technology. Up-to-date computers and software are essential. LCD projectors and Smart boards should be available in every classroom. As new technology is adopted in the business world, it should also be incorporated into our schools.

If we take a systemic approach and begin infusing our education system with these 21st century skills, the result will be informed, responsible and contributing adults. Our students will become productive workers capable of succeeding in a global economy. They will be the high-quality graduates our state and our nation need.

*Beverly Ingle is president of the Colorado Education Association. The skills described here were developed by business, technology and education leaders who make up The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (www.21stcenturyskills.org).*

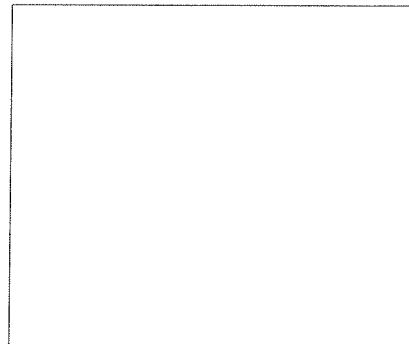
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