

“Our ability to compete as a nation—and for states, regions and communities to attract growth industries and create jobs—demands a fresh approach to public education. We need to recognize that a 21st century education is the bedrock of competitiveness—the engine, not simply an input, of the economy.”

Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 21st Century Skills, Education & Competitiveness Report, 2008/2009

21st Century Skills in Weston

We have all heard about the importance of our children learning 21st Century skills to be able to succeed in the current economy, but what exactly are those skills?

The CT State Board of Education 2006-2011 5-year plan defines 21st Century skills as a necessity to participate in today’s knowledge-based, technical economy. These skills are best described as the abilities, professional competencies, and habits of mind that extend the basic literacy skills of reading, writing, and mathematics utilizing these five core principles:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Creating and innovating
- Communicating and collaborating
- Information media and technology management
- Life and career skills

During the last 30 years, our country’s manufacturing based economy has moved into a service economy driven by information, knowledge, and innovation. It was in 1991 that U.S. spending on information technology (\$112 billion) first surpassed spending on production technology (\$107 billion) (Stewart, 1997). In response, educational frameworks have shifted to focus more on math, science and reading literacy-based curriculums that are linked to authentic real-life experiences. (1)

To appropriately prepare students to be global leaders has challenged educators to look beyond the classroom for experiential learning opportunities to combine literacy learned in the core curriculum with real world experience that create partnerships between students and the community. “To prepare students for a rapidly changing digital world, we must equip them with the cognitive skills to innovatively problem solve, to think critically, and to collaborate in order to succeed,” says Tom Scarice, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction in Weston. The Weston Public Schools are developing these skills with planned programs that are research-based and results driven.

The priorities for curriculum development in 2010-2011 include:

- K-12 Science
- K-12 21st Century Assessment Development

During the 2010-2011 school year, curriculum development initiatives in the area of K-12 Science, revised curricula in the areas of K-5 Language Arts, K-12 Physical

Education/Health, and the grades 3-8 Talented and Gifted Program (TAG) as well as the second phase of a three year plan for the K-12 World Language curriculum revisions will be implemented. The success of these curriculum revisions will be measured using rigorous 21st Century assessments that will require students to think critically and apply their learning in a variety of authentic contexts.

These programs cannot be successful without sustained professional development. During the year, staff will receive professional development training in instructional best practices in Language Arts in grades K-8 and inquiry based instruction in Science. As the integration of technology in the classroom becomes increasingly seamless, individual schools will continue to provide technology training to staff on an individual basis. In addition to individual school professional development initiatives, four full days of professional development will be provided to all certified staff.

Weston is very fortunate to have a superior team of educators promoting 21st Century skills by teaching literacy in core curriculum areas. The Weston Education Foundation is also helping students apply the skills learned in the classroom in real world situations with the funding of Phase 1 of Trojan TV and the television studio at Weston High School.

Lisa Wolak, WHS principal explained that, “The TV studio provides countless opportunities for students in all academic disciplines to be involved in authentic and relevant learning that is highly engaging and that will promote media literacy in our school community.” The studio promotes interdisciplinary opportunities among academic departments and among schools with the ability of the Weston Middle School to feed podcasts to the High School for broadcast. Students also have an opportunity to interact with the community as they write, produce, and broadcast community meetings and events on public access Channel 78 while learning critical thinking, problem solving and life skills.

Eighty percent of the jobs our students will have in 2014 do not exist today, and ninety percent of the technology we will be using in the next decade has yet to be invented. (2) Weston students, through excellent teaching, challenging curriculums, and opportunities to learn and use the skills required to be successful in the global marketplace are becoming well positioned to compete in the future service and technology world. With the skills learned in the Weston public school system, students will have the tools to become the driving force of tomorrow’s economy.

Please help the Weston Education Foundation fund Phase 2 of the Weston High School television studio with a donation. Phase 2 includes the purchase of cameras and tripods that can be used in remote locations and an upgrade of the control room and editing systems.

- (1) A Superior Education For Connecticut’s 21st Century Learners: Five-Year Comprehensive Plan for Education 2006-2011, CT State Board of Education
- (2) U.S. Department of Labor