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Contacts: Jennifer Greeson, P21
(202) 288-7589

Business and Education Leaders Articulate Vision for 21st Century Learning

Report Offers Recommendations and Tools to Prepare Students for Real World

SEATTLE (June 30, 2003) – The nation must do a better job of preparing students for life in the 21st century, says a report by a coalition of education, business and government leaders issued today. The economic and civic well-being of the nation demands that students be equipped for the evolving challenges of this era, according to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is a unique public-private organization whose members include the AOLTW Foundation, Apple, Cable in the Classroom, Cisco, Dell, Microsoft, the National Education Association and SAP. The effort is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. The Partnership has come together to reach consensus on and advocate for a model of learning that will help close the gap between the knowledge and skills most students learn in school and what they need in typical 21st century communities and workplaces. They have issued a free report, *Learning in the 21st Century*, and companion *MILE (Milestones for Improving Learning and Education) Guide for 21st Century Skills* to help communities develop a framework for moving forward. Both were developed through a comprehensive process involving hundreds of educators, researchers and employers across the country.

"The Partnership's leaders are calling on communities to take advantage of the window of opportunity provided by *No Child Left Behind* to put into place a long-term vision to better prepare students for the workforce and society of the 21st century. Our doctors don't treat patients using 19th century medicines: and our teachers shouldn't educate students using 19th century learning models. Today's students need to demonstrate knowledge of core subjects such as reading, math and science, but they also must learn additional skills including critical thinking, decision making, problem solving and communication and the ability to adapt to a changing world," said **Terry Crane, Partnership co-chair and vice president for education and family products, AOL, Inc. on behalf of the AOLTW Foundation.**

The Need for 21st Century Learning

Despite progress in the quality of education in the U.S. and a renewed emphasis on core subjects through *No Child Left Behind*, data show a gap between what is being taught in schools and the skills required of them to succeed in the 21st century workplace. A recent survey published by the AOLTW Foundation found that only 42 percent of Americans believe that students are being taught the critical skills needed for success in the 21st century, either in school or out of school settings.

To overcome this disparity, the Partnership urges a continued emphasis on core subjects and assessment, but also outlines the need to incorporate specific 21st century skills into learning. Their recommendations complement the requirements set by *No Child Left Behind* and will help educators more effectively implement the federal law with the long-term challenges of the 21st century in mind.

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"The work of this partnership is key to why our NEA members work in public schools every day. Educators, of course, want students to succeed daily in school, but ultimately and more importantly, they want them to succeed in life," said **John Wilson, executive director of the National Education Association.**

A New Model of Learning for the 21st Century

The Partnership's overall model for learning is based on the essential skills that people need today and tomorrow to be successful. The report identifies six key elements of a 21st century education and recommend that educators: 1) stress core subjects; 2) emphasize learning skills; 3) use 21st century tools to develop learning skills; 4) teach in a 21st century context; 5) teach using new 21st century content, and; 6) use 21st century assessments that measure core subjects and 21st century skills.

Steps Towards 21st Century Learning

Learning in the 21st Century and the *MILE Guide* created by the Partnership are powerful resources for educators and community leaders. The Report, lays out nine specific steps for communities to take in order to incorporate 21st century skills into education:

- **Embrace** a powerful vision of public education that includes 21st century skills;
- **Align** leadership, management and resources with educational goals;
- **Assess** where schools are now;
- **Prioritize** the 21st century skills to focus on;
- **Develop** a professional development plan for 21st century skills;
- **Ensure** that students have equitable access to a 21st century education;
- **Begin** developing assessments to measure student progress in 21st century skills;
- **Collaborate** with outside partners; and
- **Plan** collectively and strategically for the future.

The Report also details actions that individual stakeholders such as parents, administrators and policymakers can take to support the integration of 21st century skills in their community.

In the *MILE Guide*, the Partnership provides a roadmap for educators and administrators to measure the progress of their schools in defining, teaching, and assessing 21st century skills. By determining where they fall within a series of criteria, the hands-on tool will help each district set benchmarks and goals, apply for grants and determine funding priorities. Individuals can take an assessment at the Partnership's website, www.21stcenturyskills.org, and receive results online based on the *MILE Guide*.

21st Century Vision Will Help, Not Hinder Educators

In its Report, the Partnership acknowledges the current strain on educators and the fiscal challenges facing many states and localities. Its tools are intended to assist teachers and to help them work smarter, not harder. For example, incorporating 21st century tools more effectively into administrative routines and classrooms will give educators more time to concentrate on teaching and learning. Modernizing assessment methods will give educators real-time information they can use to help their pupils today, instead of after students have moved on to another classroom or school.

The Partnership makes clear that given the challenges set by No Child Left Behind, states and school districts should begin now to develop and implement its vision.

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“The need for 21st century skills is not going away. Indeed it will only become more important over time,” the report states. “Strategic, long-term planning now to integrate 21st century skills into standards, curricula, assessments and professional development will be more effective in the long run than adding them piecemeal later. This is the right time for states and school districts to begin integrating 21st century skills into education.”

To that end, the Partnership is launching a major public education campaign that will engage educators, business leaders, policymakers, parents and child advocates alike. The organization will reach out to various groups nationwide to instigate a dialogue on the importance of a 21st century education, communicate the significance of 21st century learning and emphasize the need to integrate 21st century skills into curriculum. Additionally, many of the Partnership’s members will either sponsor various “Leadership Institutes” around the country and/or work with specific school districts to implement the MILE Guide and help them take steps towards incorporating 21st century learning.

The Partnership will provide a number of additional deliverables for educators and community leaders throughout the next few years, including professional development and technology literacy tools. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is a joint project developed and administered cooperatively by Infotech Strategies and JES & Co. The Partnership is based in Washington, DC and Tucson, Arizona. More information can be found at www.21stcenturyskills.org