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Are Schools Failing Kids in 21st Century Skills?

by Dave Nagel

Are students getting what they need out of schools in order to succeed in the 21st century? Whatever your own opinion, Americans, in large part, think schools are failing in this regard, and they spread the blame around to school leaders, teachers, and parents, according to a new survey released this week by Harris Interactive and commissioned by ASQ, a quality control/management association.

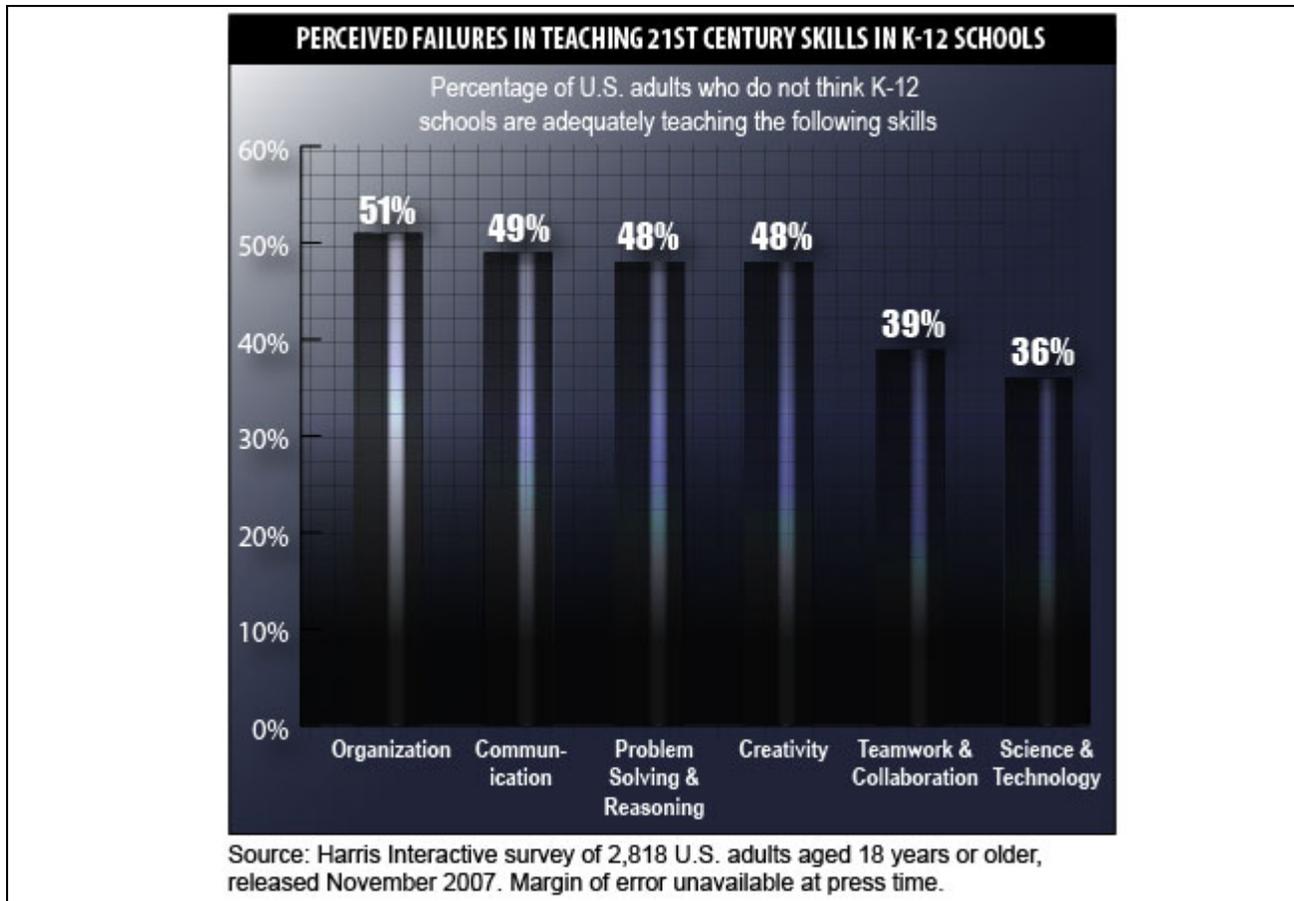
21st century learning is, of course, at the forefront of discussion in education, whether it be the tools and methods used to teach students or the specific skills and subject areas being taught to students. ASQ initiated the survey to discover the attitudes toward 21st century learning among the general adult population.

Not surprisingly, a large percentage of the general adult population in the United States considers schools lacking in terms teaching 21st century skills. Of the 2,818 U.S. adults polled in October by Harris, 51 percent said they thought K-12 schools were not doing a good job of teaching organizational skills, and 49 percent said they thought schools were not teaching effective communications skills.

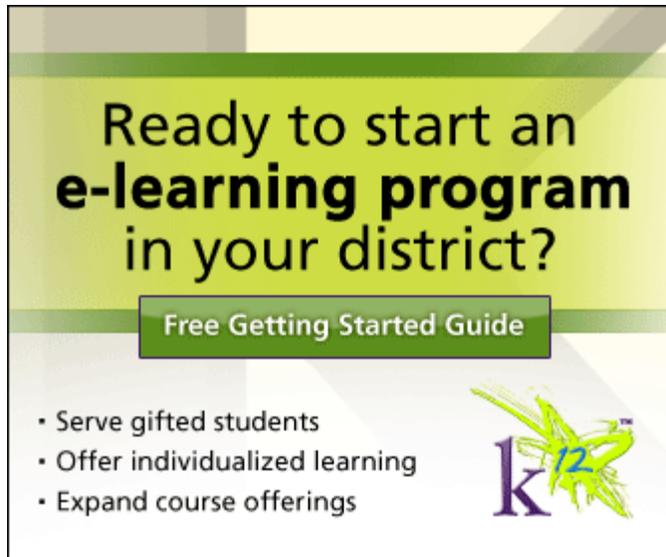
At the same time, a solid 96 percent said they think students today need to improve upon skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. Of these, 64 percent said schools are not making these skills a priority.

And who's to blame? Sixty-four percent said blame falls squarely on a lack of parental involvement. Thirty-four percent blame school leaders for "not having the vision to change their school system," and 23 placed the blame on a lack of qualification on the part of teachers. And, on the whole, according to the survey, only 24 percent of adults are happy with what's being taught in K-12 schools. (That's a harsh public.)

Further K-12 failures in various areas of 21st century learning, as perceived by the general adult population in the United States, follow.



"It's evident that many Americans believe our schools must better prepare students to function and contribute in a highly competitive 21st century world," said Jay Marino, chair of ASQ's K-12 Education Committee, who's also assistant superintendent for the Cedar Rapids Community Schools in Iowa. "While No Child Left Behind has been striving to improve test scores, the survey suggests that what adults really support are efforts to improve skills like problem-solving and creativity, which are not tracked on these tests."



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Other findings released from the survey include:

- Eighty-seven percent of adults said K-12 education needs to be improved, with 52 percent saying education needs "serious improvement";
- Forty-seven percent said kids lack motivation to succeed; and
- Thirty-five percent said that state and local governments are not holding schools accountable "to adequately train students."

For a little twist, in a separate survey of 1,284 kids aged 8 to 18, also conducted by Harris for ASQ, a majority of students (62 percent) said they're actually happy with what's being taught in schools.

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