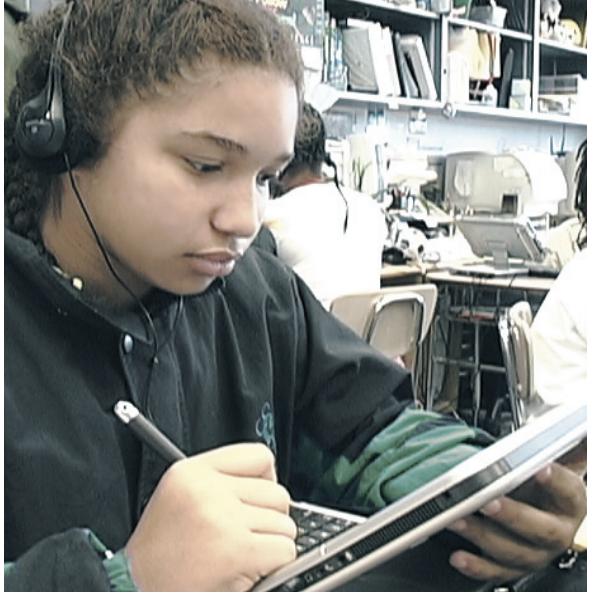# 2) Teach 21ˢᵗ century skills

In the past, it was not considered essential for every student to learn rigorous content. Many jobs were available for students with minimal academic skills. In today's information age, jobs that once required only low levels of reading and mathematical skills now require higher-level skills. In the future, there will be more to know and more to answer.

Today's students are growing up in a digital environment. Almost 100 million young people born between 1976 and 2000 will come to adulthood having grown up with the Internet and the use of digital technologies. Often referred to as "Millennials," these children and teenagers use computers and the Internet more than any other age group. According to the United States Department of Education, 90% of children between the ages of 5–17 use computers and more than 90% of students in the 12–18 age group use the Internet. These students are readers and enjoy a learning environment that includes teamwork, technology, multiple focal points, action and interaction, movement, and materials that are visual and dynamic. "Millennials" expect to receive frequent and instantaneous feedback and to learn skills and concepts that will help make their working lives less stressful and increase their marketability (Blake, 2003).

Schools that do not infuse 21ˢᵗ century skills into the traditional curriculum are not meeting these children's expectations and needs. Generally, these 21ˢᵗ century skills are identified as information and communication skills, thinking and problem-solving skills, and interpersonal and self-directional skills.

> **"Students who have access to technology outside of school will find schools without access to and integration of technology into their coursework to be antiquated and irrelevant to their world."**
>
> *Partnership for 21st Century Skills*

While it might be argued that these skills are often included at a basic level in today's curriculum, the skill level necessary for success in the 21ˢᵗ century workforce far exceeds the basic. Content must be taught in a 21ˢᵗ century context with the use of relevant and real world examples, applications, and settings to frame academic content for students, enabling them to see the connections between their studies and the world in which they live. (Partnership for 21ˢᵗ Century Mile Guide) Additionally, students must be given the tools they need to simulate an authentic work environment in order to achieve these skills at a higher level than is currently expected of them as students.

These 21ˢᵗ century skills do not make up an additional course, but rather they must be integrated within the traditional curriculum to be authentic. At work, adults solve problems related to the goals and objectives of our jobs, we communicate specific concepts and information, we adapt to the personalities and varied roles and responsibilities of co-workers within the scope of the work environment, and we find motivation and inspiration that drives us to do our best at our work.

❑ **Guiding principle:** 21ˢᵗ century curriculum must be infused with skills necessary for living and working in an ever-changing society. Relevant, real world education should include:

- information and communication skills
- thinking and problem-solving skills
- interpersonal and self-directional skills