

New Skills for a New Century



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By Anita McAnear

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In 1991, the National Center on Education and the Economy released its report *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* The report played a key role in launching the standards movement in the United States. Now the NCEE has released the report of a new commission on the American workforce. *Tough Choices or Tough Times—The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce* (<http://www.skillscommission.org>) works from the premise that those countries that produce the most important *new* products and services will be able to pay high wages to their workers.

Doing so involves maintaining a technological lead for each particular industry, but it also depends on a “deep vein” of creativity, resulting in workers “who can imagine how people can use things that have never been available before, create ingenious marketing and sales campaigns, write books, build furniture, make movies, and imagine new kinds of software that will capture people’s imaginations and become indispensable to millions.”

The list of skills from the report would gladden the heart of any educator seeking learning environments that develop students to their full potential:

- strong content knowledge in language, mathematics, technology, science, literature, history, and the arts
- the ability to think abstractly, good at both analysis and synthesis
- creativity and innovation as well as self discipline and organization
- the ability to work as a member of a team and adapt to frequent changes

The report goes on to enumerate some rather innovative solutions for improving our current educational system, and I highly recommend that you read it. I am particularly struck by and encouraged by the emphasis on creativity and innovation that many economic leaders such as Thomas Friedman and the business and education leaders involved in this latest commission are advocating. ISTE leadership and members have embraced this idea as well. Currently, it is reflected in the newest and first standard for the revised National Educational Standards for Students (NETS•S):

1. Creativity and Innovation
Students think creatively, construct knowledge, and develop innovative products using technology. Students:
 - a) apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas and products
 - b) use technology for creative self-expression
 - c) use systems thinking to explore complex issues
 - d) identify trends and forecast possibilities

I hope we are reaching a tipping point of consensus on the importance of creativity and innovation that will end the current gridlock on testing and emphasis of basic skills in a limited number of areas. The report covers the conditions for schools to operate in creative and innovative ways, but it does not go into the curriculum necessary to encourage these traits in students. Developing creative and innovative ways for implementing NETS•S Standard 1 will be up to us! ■