Quality in Education: Many K-12 Students Behind in 21st Century Skills

For Immediate Release

Quality in Education: Many K-12 Students Behind in 21st Century Skills

Schools Not Turning Out Problem-Solvers, ASQ Survey Shows

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 9, 2007 – Many kids in the system are not being provided the skills they will need to succeed in the 21st century, according to a recent survey conducted by Harris Interactive on behalf of the American Society for Quality (ASQ). An overwhelming majority of adults feel that students today need to improve upon skills necessary for the 21st century.

ASQ conducted the survey to provide educators with a better understanding of some of the most pressing education quality concerns that are facing schools today.

The survey finds that adults do NOT think K-12 U.S. schools are teaching the following 21st century skills:

- Organizational skills, e.g. to prioritize and manage time
- Communications skills, e.g. listening and speaking (49%)
- Problem-solving and reasoning (48%)
- Creativity, e.g. providing innovative solutions to everyday problems (48%)
- Teamwork and collaboration (39%)
- Science and technology (36%)

Among adults who think students today need to improve such skills, two-thirds (64%) place the blame on a lack of parental involvement, 47% of adults feel that kids lack motivation to succeed, and 35% state/local government is holding schools accountable to adequately train students.

“It’s evident that many Americans believe our schools must do a better job of preparing students to function and contribute in a highly competitive 21st century,” said Jay Marino, chair of ASQ’s K-12 Education Committee. “We’ve 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.”

Marino is also superintendent for the Cedar Rapids Community School District.
Other findings:

- Kids age 8 to 18 are significantly happier with what is taught in K-12 education than adults (62% kids vs. 24% adults).
- In fact, nearly 9 out of 10 adults (87%) agree that the education system needs improvement with about half (49%) saying it needs major improvement.
- Men are more likely than women to say that the U.S. K-12 education system is not doing an effective job of training students in problem-solving and reasoning (51% men vs. 45% women) and technology (39% men vs. 32% women) in order to be better prepared for the 21st century.
- Of the adults who think students need to improve their skills in the 21st century, 34% of adults specifically blame educational leaders for not having the vision to change their school systems.

About the Survey

Harris Interactive fielded the online survey on behalf of the American Society for Quality between October 19 and October 23, 2007 among 2,862 adults ages 18 years of age or older and fielded a separate youth online survey between October 17 and October 23, 2007 among 1,284 youth ages 8 to 18. Estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full statement for both studies is available.

About American Society for Quality

The American Society for Quality sponsors the annual National Conference, http://nqec.asq.org/, the nation’s leading conference for quality professionals, quality practitioners and support personnel to learn about the use of concepts that can be applied to improve U.S. schools. Since 1949, ASQ has offered training and other quality tools to help educators implement improvement initiatives in their districts.

The American Society for Quality, www.asq.org, has been the authority on quality for more than 60 years. With more than 50,000 and organizational members, the professional association advocates for quality improvement and knowledge exchange to improve business processes, create better workplaces and communities worldwide. As the voice of the quality movement, ASQ offers technologies, concepts, tools and knowledge to quality professionals, quality practitioners and everyday consumers encouraging all to Make Good Great®. ASQ has been the sole sponsor of the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award since 1988. ASQ is a founding partner of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), a prominent quality indicator, and also produces the Quarterly Quality Report.