

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills at Pentucket Regional High School

21<sup>st</sup> century skills is an increasingly common phrase in conversations about education these days. As we unpack what 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills are, we find there are threads between those skills and the skills we have been developing in students for years. So, what needs to change in education to ensure all students leave public schools with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills?

Tony Wagner, in the November 12th Education Week, describes the seven survival skills needed to make it in college, excel in a good job and to be a leader in the community. After interviews with college professors, college students, business executives and armed forces officers, he has identified these seven skills... 1. critical thinking problem solving, 2. collaborating and leading across networks, 3. agility and adaptability, 4. initiative and entrepreneurialism, 5. effective oral and written communication, 6. accessing and analyzing information, 7. curiosity and imagination.

In our own PRHS Mission and Expectations for Student Learning, last revised in 2003, we identified many similar skills including... 1. working both independently and cooperatively, 2. information literacy and technological fluency, 3. creative thinking skills, 4. critical thinking skills, 5. decision making skills, 6. communicating effectively (writing, speaking, creative expression, reading, listening), 7. taking responsibility for learning.

Our responsibility to students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to compare the skills that researchers like Tony Wagner have identified, with the traditional expectations we have developed locally and used for years. Our schools currently teach many of the skills on Mr. Wagner's list. However, we rarely have the formal curriculum and assessment practices that ensure all students develop 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills to mastery. Government, business and community leaders, in increasing numbers, are demanding school systems change to support 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills development. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) calls for high schools to have "challenging and measurable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations for all students which address academic, social and civic domains, and are defined by school-wide rubrics that identify targeted high levels of achievement". We cannot ensure that all students will leave our system with the skills they need to "survive" and thrive without aggressively teaching and assessing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in our schools. Fortunately, Pentucket Regional School District has begun the process of defining 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in our 5 Elements of Powerful Learning and soon to be published Habits of Learning documents. Retooling our schools to develop 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in each student will be both exciting and challenging work. These documents will help bring into focus the changes that will support our students to survive and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.