

# Seven Skills That Students Need to Succeed in College and Beyond

“Even in America’s most highly regarded secondary schools,” writes Harvard researcher Tony Wagner in this *Education Week* article, “we are not teaching or testing the skills that matter most for college, careers, and citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Based on his interviews with college teachers, college students, business executives, and officers in the armed forces, Wagner has identified seven “survival skills” that all students need to make it in college, excel in good jobs, and be leaders in their communities:

- *Critical thinking and problem-solving* – Every college student needs to be able to think critically and apply knowledge to new situations, says Wagner, and businesses are looking for workers who are able to think about continuously improving products, processes, and services.

- *Collaborating and leading across networks* – “Most work in this country is done in teams,” says Wagner, but K-12 classrooms mostly have students doing solo work. It’s only in athletics and other extracurricular activities that students learn about teamwork.

- *Agility and adaptability* – Most current jobs will change or cease to exist, business executives told Wagner, so workers need to be nimble and able to use a variety of tools to solve new problems.

- *Initiative and entrepreneurialism* – “If you try five things and get all five of them right, you may be failing,” says Mark Chandler, senior vice president at Cisco Systems. “If you try 10 things and get eight of them right, you’re a hero.” His point is that the best workers set stretch goals and constantly push the envelope.

- *Effective oral and written communication* – College teachers and business leaders say that poor writing and speaking skills are a major problem for many of today’s young people.

- *Accessing and analyzing information* – High-school students may be adept at surfing the Net, says Wagner, but very few know how to do an effective Internet search and zero in on the most important information.

- *Curiosity and imagination* – “I want people who can think – they’re not just bright, they’re also inquisitive,” says former CEO Clay Parker. “Are they engaged, are they interested in the world?”

Mastery of these seven skills is the key to the United States remaining competitive in the global economy, Wagner concludes. He believes that college admissions officers should push high schools to teach and test these critical competencies, emphasizing them more than test scores or memorized knowledge.

“Teaching and Testing the Skills That Matter Most” by Tony Wagner in *Education Week*, Nov. 12, 2008 (Vol. 28, #12, p. 30)

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/11/12/12wagner.h28.html>