

# Success in School

By Dr. Andrew Rose

A CHANGING WORLD REQUIRES that school board trustees and administrators map out a clear path that supports continuous student achievement. This journey requires an understanding of what the business world requires, how schools have changed and how parents can be our partners in raising academic standards.

**What the Business World Requires** In 1990, the U.S. Department of Labor assigned The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) the task of examining the demands of the workplace and whether young people were being prepared to meet those demands.

The Commission's study, which can be found at the Department of Labor's web site at [www.doleta.gov](http://www.doleta.gov), concluded that: "All American high school students must develop a new set of competencies and foundation skills if they are to enjoy a productive, full, and satisfying life." These new competencies are described in the box on page 26.

**How Public Education Has Changed** Today's students are being challenged beyond the "Three R's" of the 20th Century. Today's new and more rigorous academic standards require students to reflect, evaluate, estimate, predict, conclude and interpret information. They must, above all, think on a higher level.

There are several changes in the ways the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards are taught to children. As educators, we must understand that there is a balance that is required in teaching reading skills, such as phonics, vocabulary development and comprehension. Likewise, in teaching students how to write, students must be taught to think



The "Inside Track"  
on improving  
student  
achievement.



# The Five Competencies for Success

The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) study identified five competencies that it deemed necessary to succeed in the business world. These competencies are in two broad categories—thinking skills and social skills. The following competencies support the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards that promote processing skills that serve as guidelines for all public schools in the state.

- 1 Resources** People need thinking and social skills that enable them to identify, organize, plan and allocate adequate resources to succeed. Examples of resources are time, money, human relationships and materials.
- 2 Interpersonal** People must have the social skills to work well with others and be effective team players, provide leadership and negotiate effectively, and work with diverse people.
- 3 Information** Students' thinking skills must be developed so they can find and use information and are able to evaluate, organize, interpret, and communicate it effectively.
- 4 Systems** Students must understand complex inter-relationships and recognize trends and patterns. They must also be able to predict the impact of such patterns.
- 5 Technology** Today's high school students must be able to work and apply a variety of technologies to complex tasks and situations.

about a topic, organize ideas and then how to draft and revise their writing.

Students must be able to expand their grasp of mathematics through problem-solving and open-ended questions. Educators can help them reach this understanding by explaining in paragraph form the methods they use to solve problems. An inquiry and hands-on approach to science makes learning real. Although note-taking, lab reports and multiple choice tests remain tools of the trade, they are used far less now in the classroom.

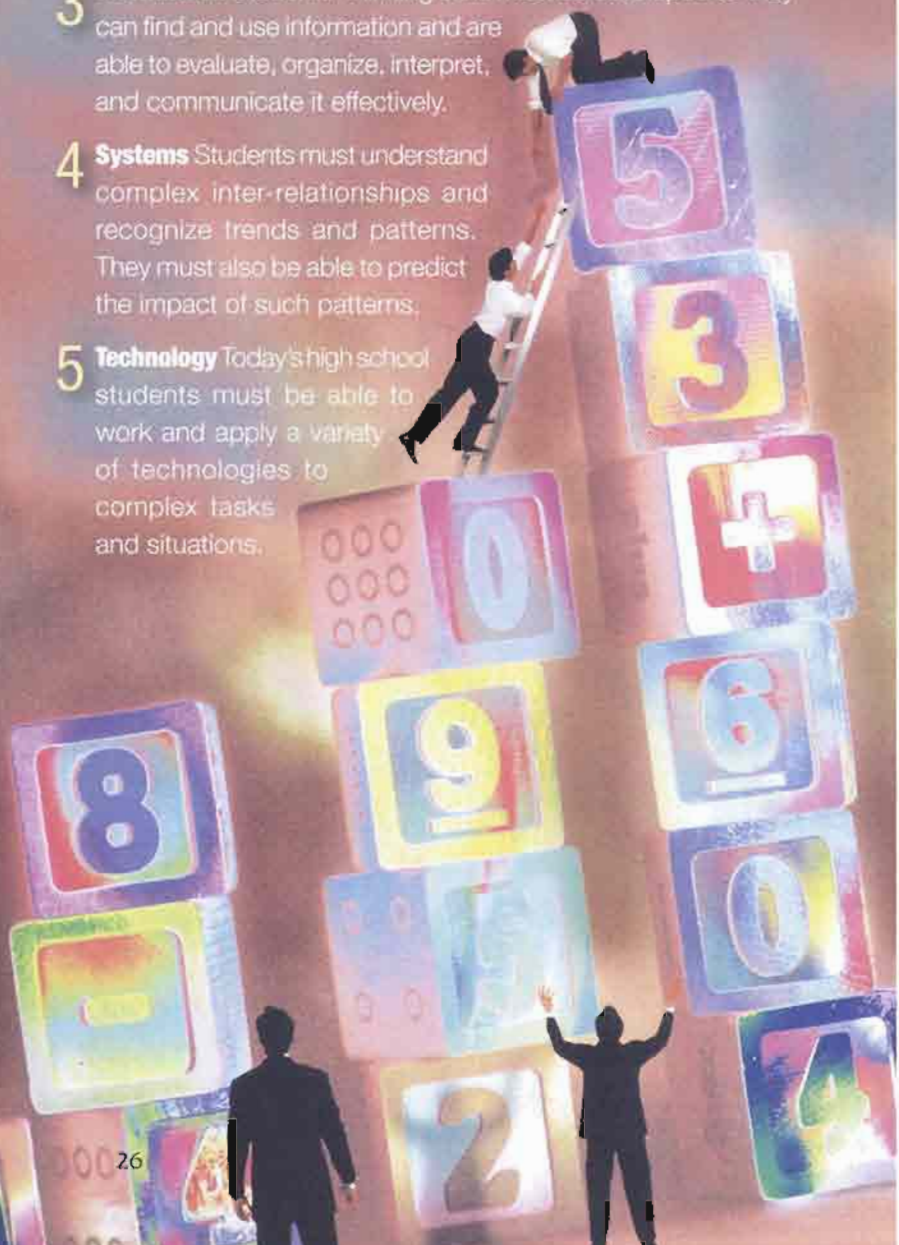
Teaching social studies today requires less memorization of facts and instead emphasizes a deeper understanding of how and why history evolves. Educators must focus on the broad context in which events occur, using a multi-cultural perspective, rather than a singular interpretation. It is important that current events be critically analyzed.

At a time when funding for the arts is often slashed, music and art have actually increased in their importance. Ancient civilizations are best remembered for their great works of visual art, architecture, music, drama, literature and poetry. That is why we acknowledge the arts through creative production, history and aesthetic criticism.

Health education, which is mandated, reaches into mental health, physical health, safe living, substance abuse and family life. The extensive curriculum includes basic motor skills, advanced body control activities, sport game skills and rules, dance and physical fitness.

Underlying and supporting these areas—reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, world language, music and art, and physical education—is technology, which is used to teach and learn the various curricula.

**The Role of Parents** The government is requiring teachers to teach differently and also asking children to learn differently. New Jersey tests are tied to this new kind of learning and are made up of many questions that challenge children to show how well they can reflect,



evaluate, estimate, predict, infer, conclude, interpret, imagine and create. Parents can help their children succeed in school in this new environment.

Parents can have family meetings to let their children know how important a good education is to their lives. They need to educate their children about why education matters and what kind of doors open up in life to those who are well-educated.

They must read to their children, even when the children are older. They should encourage their children to read to them, and should talk about the book or story. These simple steps will promote life-long learning.

Children should have a quiet place to study and do homework—no television, no instant messaging, no telephone calls. Parents should always look at the finished homework to see if it is neat and complete.

Parents are important to helping children develop their self-reliance. They must let their children know that school is priority number one. They must let their children know that they have high standards and expect them to do their very best. They should support their teachers so the children will respect them. After-school activities must provide time for some type of physical exercise. Do not over-schedule children; make them realize that more is not always better. Setting limitations on activities enables children to have unstructured time to relax.

Teachers report that students as young as second graders misuse the Internet. No parent should be afraid to supervise and monitor the child's use of this technology. Make sure you can easily see the computer screen. Computers belong in a family room, not in a child's bedroom. Children should be forbidden to post photos of themselves on the Internet.

Families should plan trips and activities that include enriching experiences, such as trips to museums, historical sites, concerts, libraries, other states and even other countries.

Today's new and more rigorous academic standards require students to reflect, evaluate, estimate, predict, conclude and interpret information.

Children must be taught to understand and accept that life can be a struggle, and that success requires hard work over a long period of time. Children often have a distorted idea of success as being something that magically happens without required and sustained effort on their part. Children should know their parents' beliefs and values and their family culture and history.

**Politics and Education** New Jersey's curriculum guidelines are rigorous and have changed the ways in which public education delivers instruction, provides professional development for its teachers, holds students and schools accountable, and affects the way children learn. Yet, we all feel the relentless assault on public education by 1703, media denigration, unfunded mandates, the ever-increasing spiral of rising entitlements and vouchers. Sometimes, the facts get lost in the noise.

The reality is that today's public schools are fundamentally different from the ones in which most of us grew up. Schools today must continue to deal with a population divided in its beliefs, and plagued by poverty and continued discrimination. A hedonistic culture undermines both traditional work ethics and family values, and our society promotes materialism over appreciating fine arts or literature. Young parents increasingly have fewer extended family networks to support them.

Public schools are now in sync with the demands of a changing world. Ironically, it is often the politicians who remain out of touch with the reality of their constituents' lives. **sl**

---

**Dr. Andrew Rose** is president of the Bergen County Association of School Administrators and Chief School Administrator of the Norwood Public School District.