

The Issue:

Preparing Students for Today's Interconnected World

In November 2002, the National Geographic Society released a study documenting a worldwide lack of knowledge of geography and current affairs among young adults. Our nation's young adults, ages 18 to 24, were next to last among nine countries surveyed. The great majority – 83 percent – could not find Afghanistan or Israel on a world map, but knew that the island featured in last season's TV show "Survivor" was in the South Pacific. Compared with youth from other nations, Americans held a greatly inflated self-image: nearly 30 percent estimated the U.S. population at a billion or more. Less than half could find France, the United Kingdom, or Japan on a world map; less than two-thirds could correctly identify a much larger landmass, China.

A year earlier, the Asia Society's National Commission on Asia in the Schools issued its report, entitled *Asia in the Schools: Preparing Young Americans for Today's Interconnected World*, which documented the gap between what Americans want and need to know about Asia and the knowledge they actually possess. The report found that "vast numbers of U.S. citizens – particularly young Americans – remain dangerously uninformed about Asia and international matters." In spite of the growing strategic economic and social importance of Asia acknowledged by the majority of those surveyed, Americans lack even basic knowledge of Asia's geography, history, people or economic and political systems.

The international knowledge gap exposed by these studies would have been cause for concern even before September 11, 2001. But the terrorist attacks and the global political climate since have heightened the awareness of a disconnect between the increasing importance of other world regions to our nation's economic prosperity and national security, and most Americans' meager knowledge about regions and issues beyond our own. Although citizens of other countries tend to know more about the United States than Americans know about their countries, there is too often profound misunderstanding based on ignorance and misperceptions on both sides.

"Ours is a world of 24-hour-news cycles, global markets, and high-speed Internet. We need to look no further than our morning paper to see that our future, and the future of our children, is inextricably linked to the complex challenges of the global community. And for our children to be prepared to take their place in that world and rise to those challenges, they must first understand it."

***U.S. Secretary of Education,
Roderick Paige***

What's Needed:

Coordinated Efforts at the National, State, and Local Levels

Bold initiatives are needed now to address the international knowledge and skills gap. We can close this gap through coordinated strategies at the national, state, and local levels. The campaign has already begun.

Last year, the first ever States Institute on International Education in the Schools was held in Washington, DC from November 20-22, 2002. Discussions at the States Institute pointed to five key issues that need to be addressed if we are to make knowledge of other world regions, cultures, and international affairs available to all students.

1. Policymakers at all levels must make education about other world regions and cultures a significant **priority**. This is a missing element in our efforts to promote educational excellence.
2. Opportunities must be provided for **teachers** to learn about the history, geography, and economics of different world regions and about international relations through pre-service preparation, professional development, and through direct exposure to other cultures through travel, study and exchange.
3. We need to develop an effective **K-16 pipeline in major world languages** through a mixture of requirements, incentives to begin earlier, and innovative approaches.
4. **Partnerships and exchanges** both real and “virtual” between schools and educators in the U.S. and schools in other parts of the world provide a means for mutual education and need to be greatly expanded.
5. High-quality materials and practical ways to **integrate** international content into different **curricular areas** and other areas of **school reform** need to be developed.

At the first States Institute, the Asia Society announced the formation of the **National Coalition on Asia and International Education in the Schools**, “a broad-based, informal coalition of leadership groups that share a deep interest in promoting the close ties between international affairs, cross-cultural understanding, economic development and education reform.”

The coalition, which is co-chaired by former governors James B. Hunt Jr. of North Carolina and John Engler of Michigan, includes executives of national education associations, business leaders, policymakers, scholars, and heads of media organizations. The goals of the National Coalition are to (1) raise awareness; (2) stimulate new and supportive policies; (3) build stronger networks of educators; and (4) increase the supply of effective and sustainable educational programs about Asia and other world regions.

For more information, see their web site:
<http://www.internationaled.org/national.htm>.

Getting Started: What We're Doing in Washington State

Washington state was one of 22 states to send a team to attend the 2002 *States Institute on International Education in the Schools* in Washington, DC. The State Team was invited by OSPI (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction) and the Governor to spearhead an effort to assess the state's current status with regard to International Education and to build a statewide coalition to engage the public and high-level leaders in taking action in this area.

On March 19, 2003, the State Team organized a focus group on International Education at Seattle Community College. From that initial meeting the **Washington State Coalition for International Education** was formed. At that same meeting, a representative of the Asia Society announced that Washington state was the recipient of a grant to stage a P-20 (Preschool-Graduate School) International Education Summit at the University of Washington on September 18, 2003. (For complete information about the Summit, see <http://internationaledwa.org/summit.htm>.) During the spring, the State Coalition formulated its Strategic Intent Statement.

What's Next

In the coming weeks and months, the State Coalition intends to:

- ❖ Distribute copies of the World Affairs Council's new *Teaching resources for International Education* to educators, community organizations, and policy makers (thanks to support from the American Forum for Global Education, Asia Society, and the East Asia Resource Center at the UW)
- ❖ Expand content on the International Education Washington web site <http://internationaledwa.org>
- ❖ Develop an advocacy task force for International Education

Getting Involved

If you'd like to get involved, contact the Coalition at action@internationaledwa.org.

Strategic Intent Statement for the Washington State Coalition for International Education

Education for a world of opportunity.

Definition International Education means learning the knowledge and skills needed to understand and to function productively in today's interconnected world.

Vision Washington State: A place where we build a knowledge of the world into our understanding of citizenship, and where everyone recognizes and values the spectrum of life in our world and encounters the richness of its cultural diversity, human experience, and physical resources.

Mission We inspire students, educators, and community members to broaden their educational outlooks, experiences and practices in order to more fully appreciate the world and its peoples.

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A Call to Action: Shaping the Future of International Education in Washington State

How would you answer these questions now, and how would you like to answer them in ten years?

Curricula and Standards

- ❖ How clear and specific are our state learning standards (Essential Academic Learning Requirements) in history/social studies/geography/economics; math and science; languages and literature; and arts with respect to Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and international studies?
- ❖ How many schools in our state offer nationally recognized courses with international content, such as the AP in World History, European History, Comparative Politics or Human Geography, or the International Baccalaureate?
- ❖ Is students' knowledge of other world regions and cultures assessed in our state testing program?

World Languages

- ❖ What are our state's goals in the teaching of world languages? What should they be? Does our state have a plan to develop an effective K-16 curriculum in major world languages, including non-European ones?
- ❖ Do all students have the opportunity to learn a second language? What proportion of students takes a world language in school? How many complete a four-year sequence and/or attain proficiency?
- ❖ Are there programs for "heritage" language speakers that could be built upon, or technology-assisted programs that could be utilized?

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

- ❖ Do state licensing regulations require teachers, especially teachers of social studies or history, to demonstrate knowledge of at least one other major world region or culture?
- ❖ Could state professional development resources—teacher networks, conferences, credit arrangement, funding, on-line courses and resources—do more to encourage teachers to improve their knowledge of Asia, Africa, Latin America or the Middle East?
- ❖ Does our state provide opportunities for school and district leaders to improve their international knowledge and knowledge of international programs for schools?

International Exchange Programs: Real and Virtual

- ❖ How many schools in our state have an ongoing partnership with a school in another region of the world (e.g., through sister cities or technology)?
- ❖ Does our state offer opportunities for teachers and students to study abroad or visit their peers in other countries?
- ❖ How can our state technology program scale up the number and quality of school-to-school linkages?

Integrating International Programs into School Reform

- ❖ Are there state - or district-sponsored "international schools" that have integrated strong international content across the curriculum?
- ❖ How many schools in our state have used the International Baccalaureate program or internationally-oriented AP courses? In what ways can their experience with those programs be applied to other schools?
- ❖ In what ways can existing student programs be expanded and offered to a broader population of students so that no child is left behind?

Involving Business and the Community

- ❖ How might local businesses, higher education institutions or cultural organizations support this work?

Questions adapted with permission from the *States Institute on International Education in the Schools Institute Report Nov 20-22, 2002* <http://www.internationaleled.org/Asia%20Society%20States%20Institute%20Report.pdf>