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## **Teaching for a Shared Future: American Educators Need to Think Globally**

American students' lack of knowledge about the world is unsettling.

According to surveys by *National Geographic* and *Asia Society*, young Americans are next to last in their knowledge of geography and current affairs compared to peers in eight other countries, and the overwhelming majority of college-bound seniors cannot find Afghanistan, Iraq or Israel on a world map.

Less than one half of today's high school students study a foreign language, and while a million study French, a language spoken by some 80 million worldwide, less than 75,000 study Chinese, a language spoken by some 1.3 billion. Minority students especially have little access to global topics taught in "higher performing" schools, ranging from languages and economics to exchanges, arts and cultural activities.

The typical teacher or supervisor is not prepared to address this gap: most educators have not taken any international courses and comparatively few participate in study abroad programs.

Our concern stated simply is this: America's leadership position depends on preparing students to be savvy citizens with the specific competencies needed to compete and cooperate in a global age. While debate over the building of the Islamic Cultural Center and limiting illegal immigration has made headlines, we have noticed that nary a word of the dialogue has focused on what we are teaching children about the connections between educational success and the value of cultural and global knowledge to a productive, shared future.

Educators rarely delve into the sensitive issues of race, religion and culture -- they are so

charged. However as forward-looking educators and parents, we realize that our nation's most pressing problems -- from cooperative security concerns in the Middle East -- to the clean-up of the Gulf Region -- to the imperative to develop environmentally safe, renewable energy sources -- depend on intercultural work teams that practice the values of openness and respect.

In the 21st century, young people who understand the dynamics of global economic and intercultural relations will have a distinct advantage in securing good jobs. Those with knowledge of world history, languages, global health and international affairs will be able to make informed decisions as voters about domestic issues influenced by global circumstances.

It is time to pivot from the "wedge politics" of the summer to reflect on the educational implications: While it is a point of strength and pride that we have every part of the world represented in our communities, have we successfully "put the world" into our classrooms? And how can teaching about the world help us guide students to have a rigorous intellectual foundation for learning that promotes the distinctly American core values of tolerance and respect?

Here are three ways to add global competency to school reform so that the next generation keeps our country strong while defending fundamental freedoms.

**First**, let's train at least 100,000 teachers in international subjects and foreign languages. During the Cold War era, our nation made an admirable commitment to science and math education by creating the National Science Foundation. It helped us reach the moon. The president's and private sector's efforts to re-energize STEM education for the current generation are of vital significance. The emphasis will fall short if the importance of international knowledge and skills is overlooked. To "educate to innovate," a new cadre of highly qualified teachers of critical languages such as Arabic and Chinese who can promote understanding of the international dimensions of subject content must be prepared. A new public-private partnership initiative could draw from successful models created by the Peace Corps and Teach for America, both of which have prepared thousands of intellectually curious teachers committed to education and global success.

**Second**, every school and state should examine its learning standards and integrate global benchmarks about the international dimensions of subjects into curricula, assessments and professional development programs. Resources to map out global competencies are available from the Asia Society's International Studies Schools and Global Partnership for Learning initiatives.

The common core standards also offer a new opportunity to reduce the number of state level assessments and increase our focus on internationally benchmarked standards that colleges and university's value.

**Finally**, let's propel US schools out of their time warp while taking advantage of young people's natural interests in other nation's people, culture, music and technology. Recent studies indicate that most teens are bored with conventional school offerings which leads many to lower performance or dropping out. One solution: unpack the homegrown technological tools that are the envy of the world to reengage digital and global kids. Take off the internet filters, reward excellent virtual teaching wherever it takes place, lift the bans on mobile and game-based media, and open-up educational resources to the globe's intellectual resources.

An immediate step would be to use existing infrastructure by adding support to design and deliver excellent international courses to the growing network of state-run virtual schools, modeled on Florida's Virtual School's pioneering work. Many universities who are part of the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement such as the MIT Open Courseware initiative

have already made online language instruction of world class quality available, but K-12 schools are not yet able to participate at critical mass.

Also, with the digital games and mobile revolution, we now have largely untapped but fabulous global education and classroom collaboration resources such as epals, and iEarn to help children and teachers connect via virtual communications and exchanges, and games such as Peacemaker, and Ayiti: the Cost of Life, which teach children mutual respect and to solve global problems together.

The current economic crisis has swayed too many Americans to look inward. Political demagogues have used discontent to marginalize the groups that view our country as a magnet for freedom and democracy lovers.

Educators should not be sidetracked from a stark reality -- our future as the world's innovation leader requires difficult but needed long-term steps to prepare our children for a diverse and interconnected global age. The "new foundation" for America's promise begins this fall in every school. By teaching about the world beyond our borders we will discover new ideas and advance the relentless quest for a "more perfect" union that makes the US truly exceptional.

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