

## Becoming Citizens of the World

*The future is here. It's multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual. But are students ready for it?*

**By Vivien Stewart,** Published: April 2007

The world into which today's high school students will graduate is fundamentally different from the one in which many of us grew up.

We're increasingly living in a globalized society that has a whole new set of challenges. Four trends have brought us here.

The first trend is economic. The globalization of economies and the rise of Asia are central facts of the early 21st century. Since 1990, 3 billion people in China, India, and the former Soviet Union have moved from closed economies into a global one. The economies of China, India, and Japan, which represented 18 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2004, are expected to represent 50 percent of the world's GDP within 30 years (Wilson, 2005). One in five U.S. jobs is now tied to international trade, a proportion that will continue to increase (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Moreover, most U.S. companies expect the majority of their growth to be in overseas markets, which means they will increasingly require a workforce with international competence. According to the Committee for Economic Development (2006).

To compete successfully in the global marketplace, both U.S.-based multinational corporations as well as small businesses increasingly need employees with knowledge of foreign languages and cultures to market products to customers around the globe and to work effectively with foreign employees and partners in other countries.

Science and technology are changing the world and represent a second trend. *In The World Is Flat*, Thomas Friedman (2005) describes how the “wiring of the world” and the digitization of production since 1998 are making it possible for people to do increasing amounts of work anywhere and anytime. Global production teams are becoming commonplace in business. In addition, scientific research, a key driver of innovation, will increasingly be conducted by international teams as other countries ramp-up their scientific capacity.

The third trend involves health and security matters. Every major issue that people face—from environmental degradation and global warming, to pandemic diseases, to energy and water shortages, to terrorism and weapons proliferation—has an international dimension. Solving these problems will require international cooperation among governments, professional organizations, and corporations. Also, as the line between domestic and international affairs blurs, U.S. citizens will increasingly vote and act on issues—such as alternative energy sources or security measure linked to terrorism—that require a greater knowledge of the world. In response to this need, a 2006 report from the National Association of State Boards of Education recommends infusing classroom instruction with a strong global perspective and incorporating discussions of current local, national, and international issues and events.

The fourth trend is changing demographics. Globalization has accelerated international migration.

New immigrants from such regions as Asia and Central and South America are generating a diversity in U.S. communities that mirrors the diversity of the world. Knowledge of other cultures will help students understand and respect classmates from different countries and will promote effective leadership abroad.

In short, U.S. high school graduates will ...

- Sell to the world.
- Buy from the world.
- Work for international companies.
- Manage employees from other cultures and countries.
- Collaborate with people all over the world in joint ventures.
- Compete with people on the other side of the world for jobs and markets.
- Tackle global problems, such as AIDS, avian flu, pollution, and disaster recovery (Center for International Understanding, 2005).

However, U.S. schools are not adequately preparing students for these challenges. Surveys conducted by the Asia Society (2002) and National Geographic-Roper (2002) indicated that, compared with students in nine other industrialized countries, U.S. students lack knowledge of world geography, history, and current events. And shockingly few U.S. students learn languages that large numbers of people speak, such as Chinese (1.3 billion speakers) and Arabic (246 million speakers).

Many countries in Europe and Asia are preparing their students for the global age by raising their levels of education attainment; emphasizing international knowledge, skills, and language acquisition; and fostering respect for other cultures. The United States must create its own education response to globalization, which should include raising standards, increasing high school and college graduation rates, and modernizing and internationalizing the curriculum.

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*<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr07/vol64/num07/Becoming-Citizens-of-the-World.aspx>*