

Education for Global Leadership: The Importance of International Studies and Foreign Language Education for U.S. Economic and National Security



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As we begin the twenty-first century, technological, economic, political, and social forces have created a new era. Technological advancements and lower trade barriers have paved the way for the globalization of markets, bringing intense competition to the U.S. economy. Political systems and movements around the world are having a profound impact on our national security, as well as on our human security. The increasing diversity of our workplaces, schools, and communities is changing the face of our society. To confront the twenty-first century challenges to our economy and national security, our education system must be strengthened to increase the foreign language skills and cultural awareness of our students. America's continued global leadership will depend on our students' abilities to interact with the world community both inside and outside our borders.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

OUR ECONOMY

As one of the world's most open economies, the United States already faces intense global competition, and new competitors are emerging. Globalization has enabled companies in less-developed countries to compete directly and on a more level playing field with American businesses. Therefore, U.S. companies of all sizes must succeed in overseas markets, which requires having employees with knowledge of foreign languages and cultures, as well as overseas experience.

OUR NATIONAL SECURITY

In the post-Cold War era, non-state actors who tend to speak less-commonly taught languages (which include Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Persian/Farsi, Russian, and Turkish) are challenging U.S. national security. The FBI and other federal government agencies lack sufficient linguists to translate intelligence information in these critical languages in a timely manner. Furthermore, our diplomatic efforts often have been hampered by a lack of cultural awareness. It is

increasingly important that America be better versed in the languages and cultures of other world regions, particularly the Middle East, so we can present our nation more clearly to the world.

OUR MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Today's America is, and will continue to be, characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity. In many urban, suburban, and even rural school systems, student populations are becoming more diverse. Workplaces and customers also increasingly reflect our multicultural nation, and cultural knowledge has become critical to American businesses. We must educate all of our students about the world; or suffer diminished communication among our citizens and a weaker civic culture.

GLOBAL EDUCATION TO MEET THE CHALLENGES

Most schools have not responded adequately to these challenges of the twenty-first century, and thus many American students lack sufficient knowledge of other world regions, languages, and cultures. Only about one-third of seventh to twelfth grade students—and just five percent of elementary school students—study a foreign language. Few students study the less-commonly taught “critical languages” that are vital to national security. State high school graduation requirements often include only minimal course work in international studies. At the postsecondary level, fewer than ten percent of college students enroll in a foreign language and only one percent of undergraduates study abroad.

CED believes that the international studies and foreign language education of all of our students must be strengthened to prepare today's students to become tomorrow's global leaders.

Summary of CED's Recommendations

International content should be taught across the curriculum and at all levels of learning, to expand American students' knowledge of other countries and cultures.

- International content should be integrated into each state’s K-12 curriculum standards and assessment criteria.
- States should require every high school graduate to demonstrate global literacy. High school graduates should achieve proficiency in at least one foreign language, and demonstrate knowledge of the geography and cultures of major regions of the world as well as an understanding of global issues.
- Congress should enact an Education for Global Leadership Act that provides funds to modernize and globalize the curricula of elementary and secondary schools to help states and school districts design and create curricula with innovative approaches to teaching international content.
- Teachers should receive professional development training to prepare them to teach an international curriculum.
- Colleges and universities should form partnerships with elementary and secondary schools to make available their expertise in international studies.
- Colleges and universities should internationalize their campuses by expanding study abroad opportunities for students and faculty and building institutional commitment to international education.
- Teacher education programs in colleges and universities should include a strong international component.
- Corporations should play a more active role to support education in cross-cultural competencies.

Expand the training pipeline at every level of education to address the paucity of Americans fluent in foreign languages, especially critical, less-commonly taught languages.

- Federal language initiatives should encourage states and local school districts to implement language programs in the elementary grades and offer more advanced language classes in middle schools and high schools.
- Expanding foreign language instruction in elementary and secondary schools, particularly in critical languages, will require increased professional development for teachers and employing the resources of our heritage language communities.
- To encourage enrollment in higher education programs that lead to careers as language professionals, the federal government should support advanced critical language learning

centers and consider incentives, such as loan forgiveness and scholarships.

- To develop a reservoir of critical language practitioners quickly, the federal government should streamline recruitment and training of critical-language and heritage-language speakers.
- University professional programs, such as schools of business administration, engineering, and medicine, should consider incentives to encourage students to pursue high-level foreign language study.

National leaders—political leaders, as well as the business and philanthropic communities, and the media—should inform the public about the importance of improving education in foreign languages and international studies.

- The President should host a White House Conference on Education for Global Leadership. The Conference would bring together business, education, and national-security leaders to assess how our education system—kindergarten through postsecondary—can maintain America’s economic and national security.
- Governors should take advantage of opportunities to educate their citizens about the link between international commerce and jobs in their states.
- Each Governor should convene a high-level review of the state’s K-12 curriculum and standards by business and education leaders to determine whether they reflect global content.
- Business leaders should champion international studies and foreign language education by articulating why Americans need to learn more about the world.
- Private philanthropic foundations should intensify their support for an international perspective in the curricula of our elementary and secondary schools.
- The media should increase coverage of global issues and highlight educational programs that prepare students to become global citizens.

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The complete Policy Statement, as well as other CED publications, is available online at

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