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## Global Education: A Call to Action

### A Position Paper of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents

*What is global education?* The definition of global education is not a neat and static list of programs and activities. Like the rapidly changing world in which we live, global education must evolve as educators, business leaders, and policy makers deepen their understanding of the future needs of today's students. Daniel Pink (*American School Board Journal*, September, 2007) asserts, "Today, when the shelf life of any specialized knowledge is so fleeting, we need to think of readiness as not merely a collection of specific skills, but as a broader set of human aspects- self-direction, curiosity, persistence, and the willingness to take risks." Some examples of what might be called global competence in students illuminate this concept:

- To think critically and creatively, and to be a problem solver.
- To work well independently, and in a group.
- To have strong skills in language, mathematics, and science.
- To be proficient in at least one additional language.
- To use technology to communicate and create knowledge.
- To have an understanding of world geography and politics.
- To appreciate the differences among people.
- To understand the importance of a strong work ethic for success.
- To be flexible and able to deal with ambiguity.
- To understand the United States in the context of the world today.
- To be eager to build bridges of respect and cooperation across national boundaries.

*Why should we be concerned about global education?* The expanding electronic connectivity of the world's populations, the increasing portability of work, and the entrance of new, low-wage workforces into the global economy have given rise to several studies and reports about the need for public education to change and increase student achievement in order to meet international standards. These reports suggest that America may lose its competitive edge as well as its leadership role in the world (e.g., *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, *Education for Global Leadership*). International testing data often add to public concern that America's students rank low relative to those from other countries. Both government and university officials warn that American schools must do more to prepare students for careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and develop broader perspectives on culture, language, and geography. Thus, much of the impetus that makes global education a front burner issue today derives from economic, political, and security concerns.

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At the same time, the interconnectedness of the countries and cultures of the world and the mobility of populations fuel renewed calls for mutual understanding and appreciation on a global scale. Not only is the population of the United States becoming more diverse, travel and communication are also prompting significantly more interaction among people from different cultures than ever before, and at increasing rates. When one considers the consequences of large-scale conflict throughout the world, it is imperative that all nations and peoples be able to live together in peace. Global education, when seen through this lens, is more about understanding, cooperation, and world peace.

*What can schools do?* Superintendents and school districts have ample opportunities to infuse global education into their curriculum and programs. Global education is not a new “silo” or curriculum framework that stands independently from other disciplines. Global education is best implemented within the existing structure of schools, and many of its manifestations do not add cost to school budgets. In fact, a point of departure for many school districts can be simply recognizing and valuing the diversity that exists within the school district. The following are just a few possibilities to get started:

- Form a district wide global studies committee to develop a vision and plan.
- Survey teachers to learn of existing district efforts in global education.
- Support professional development activities that provide global awareness and skills in the staff.
- Sponsor programs and activities that highlight the diversity of the existing student body (e.g., international flags, student speakers, cultural nights).
- Invite community members who work and travel internationally to share their experiences with students and staff.
- Review curriculum for the integration of global concepts (e.g. international literature in English, art exchanges with students in other countries).
- Offer elective programs (e.g., courses in global studies, global economics, global environmental studies, world religions).
- Celebrate International Education Week in November.
- Begin the study of foreign language in the elementary schools and consider introducing an Asian language to the program.
- Establish an exchange with a school in a foreign country (the exchange can be through email, a faculty exchange, or a student exchange).
- Promote service-learning projects that focus on cross cultural understandings and support (locally or abroad).

*What can students do?* The demands and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge our students to think in new ways. The most successful students will accept responsibility for their own education and know to take advantage of the opportunities that their schools offer. As students develop their academic program and participate in co-curricular activities, they should do the following:

- Pursue a demanding academic program that includes world history, government, geography, and economics as well as full sequences of English and mathematics.
- Study a foreign language through senior year in high school.

- Explore the possibility of travel abroad, including a home stay if possible.
- Use technology to learn about other countries and peoples (especially when travel is not an option).
- Participate in a service learning activity that provides a multi-cultural experience.
- Read literature of authors from a variety of cultures and countries.

*How can the Department of Education help?* The Massachusetts Department of Education is in a unique position to promote global education in the State. Its statutory role as the organization responsible for the quality of public education in Massachusetts gives it substantial authority and influence. *The International Education Initiative* (Chapter 123 of the Acts of 2006) recognizes the importance of global education. The Act created the Education and Foreign Language Fund to support school districts and established the second week of November as International Education Week. In keeping with the spirit of the legislation, the Department of Education should consider the following:

- Advocate for sufficient resources to support the implementation of the MassCore (The Massachusetts High School Program of Studies).
- Create a staff position in the Department of Education dedicated to the promotion of the broad goals of foreign language study and global education.
- Publicize the importance of global education in Massachusetts.
- Set aside resources for the Education and Foreign Language Fund.
- Include expanded treatment of global concepts in the next revision of the curriculum frameworks in social studies.
- Provide resources to educators to promote the integration of global concepts into the curriculum.
- Develop alternative modalities for foreign-born, language teachers to become licensed (this is critical in order to meet the increasing demand for teachers of Asian languages).

*What is the appropriate role for the business sector and other external partners?* The needs of the future workforce have been articulated by business and non-governmental organizations throughout the country for several years. Business leaders are concerned with the preparedness of entry-level employees both from high school and college. Since the global economy includes large and small companies in greater numbers each year, the business community must recognize its partnership role with public education to support schools and the graduates who will ultimately be their employees. The corporate sector has a clear role to play and MASS recommends the following for consideration:

- Acknowledge the role that business and industry play by informing the public of the need for a more globally competent workforce.
- Lobby for resources from the state legislature to ensure that public schools in Massachusetts can compete on international standards.
- Come forward as partners with public schools to share examples of opportunities currently in the global context and the requirements of the future workforce.

- Support schools with grants to enhance faculty professional development and student programs such as foreign exchanges. These activities are often beyond the scope of local school budgets and the resources of interested students.

Global education is critically important to the future of Massachusetts and the entire country: the global society is already upon us. The electronic connectivity of the world’s populations, the portability of work, the participation of low-wage workforces in the world economy, and the consequences of conflict among nations must capture the attention of our nation’s leaders and our schools. It matters less whether one’s interest in the topic has to do with competitiveness, or world peace. What matters is that public schools adequately prepare our students to live in a global society.

It is our duty as educators to continue to sound the alarm and remind everyone that *we must educate students for their future, not our past*. Working together, school districts, government at all levels, the Department of Education, and business leaders, have what is needed to make a difference. The Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents offers this position paper as a *call to action*.

**The Global Studies Committee  
The Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents**

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