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NASBE Commentary

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On

Citizens for the 21st Century: Revitalizing the Civic Mission of Schools

The Report of the NASBE Study Group on Civic Engagement and Ethical Behavior in a Global Society

Last September a study group of the National Association of State Boards of Education published a “call to action” for state boards of education to strengthen civic engagement and “prepare our young people to be citizens in an increasingly interconnected global stage.” It is welcome reading for those of us who, for too long, have been hearing that little can be done to introduce global perspectives into K-12 curricula and teacher training because the subject is not among state priorities. The NASBE Study Group’s recommendations include infusion of K-12 curriculum “with a strong global perspective” and re-alignment of teacher training to “include a focus on global perspectives,” as well as a checklist for action by State Boards of Education.

From my own recent U. S. Department of Education-funded independent research on the prospects for strengthening international content in the undergraduate training of K-12 teachers several similar action steps have emerged.¹ The recommendations in my reports, for both state education authorities and universities, to improve students’ preparation for the increasingly globally-oriented workplace are somewhat more specific. The data on which they are based were collected nationwide from about 400 interviews on 41 campuses and from 119 current teachers.

Certification and Standards

Several of my research results underline the need for revisions in standards for students and teachers.

- From a large majority of the current teachers, I learned that neither recent certification changes nor their states’ subject standards reflect globalization.
- Similarly, only about 25% of the university respondents in Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education (SCDEs) reported that certification requirements specify international knowledge.

- Only 31% of the SCDE respondents could say that their programs include international course requirements; reports of foreign language requirements were even fewer from both SCDEs and current teachers.

Nonetheless, I learned that many current teachers are using internationally oriented web-based materials and many SCDEs are trying, within constraints of time, resources, and other requirements, to integrate non-U.S. subject matter into their curricula. Like the NASBE Study Group's report, my research found that state-level policy adjustments in both certification requirements and standards could provide significant incentive for more effort on this aspect of civic engagement. My advisory group, and I, strongly urge inclusion of international and global perspectives in state requirements for endorsements and certification.

Undergraduate Preparation of Teachers

The NASBE Study Group's report recommends attention to the pre-service requirements for teachers, noting that their civic learning should include global perspectives, but it provides little additional guidance. To my inquiries about feasible strategies for adding international content the responses from both current teachers and SCDE personnel indicated that much that could be accomplished by building on resources already in place.

- Only about half of the teachers reported meeting a **general education requirement of at least one course with a non-US. focus**, yet nearly all considered this a good approach. SCDE respondents were not enthusiastic about adding courses, but 85% could envision general education requirements adjusted to include more international content, drawing on existing or revised courses.
- Nearly 100% of the teachers urged **inclusion of "international" or comparative modules in courses**, although few had experience with such instruction. About 95% of the responding SCDE personnel favored addition of international or comparative modules to their courses. Faculty in Arts and Sciences *and* in SCDEs liked various kinds of professional development (workshops, team teaching, and targeted overseas trips, for example) that could make this happen.
- A **minor including non-North American (U.S.)-oriented courses** was favored by 75% of the teachers, and even a majority of SCDE respondents thought it would be a good strategy, although it was noted that space in the curriculum is often too

limited. More than three quarters of the university participants reported that such minors now exist on their campuses.

Like the NASBE report, in addition to urging teacher training institutions to foster a more internationalized curriculum for their students, my report also recommends more international content in professional development for current teachers. Again, such resources exist, particularly at institutions with area and international studies programs receiving funding under Title VI of the Higher Education Act.

Foreign language competence is another contributor to development of global perspectives. The NASBE Study Group report mentions foreign language proficiency under the heading of “Action Steps,” although it does not specify foreign language training in its recommendations. More recently, a policy statement on “Global Education” issued by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (in November 2006 calls for a requirement that “all pre-service teachers to be fluent in a world language” and urges that states revise their standards to “make world languages an essential part of the curriculum for grades 3-12,” stating that “[w]e are committed to ensuring that every student graduating from an American high school will be multilingual.” The reader is probably aware of various recent federal initiatives from both the White House (the National Security Language Initiative in January 2006) and the Congress (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program and a bill recently proposed by Senator Akaka, for example) aimed at strengthening Americans’ foreign language competence, beginning in the early grades. And the Modern Language Association is studying ways to make foreign language instruction more client-friendly.

The teacher and university constituencies may well be receptive. Data from my study show that a large majority of the university participants would like to see addition or strengthening of foreign language requirements on their campuses (only a few of the participating institutions already have strong foreign language requirements for teachers-in-training). The participating teachers would seem to agree – nine to one, they felt that some foreign language competence should be required of K-12 teachers, although less than half had met any such requirement. In a related finding, more than 80% of the teachers wished that their undergraduate experience had included **study abroad**, yet less than half of the participating teachers had ever lived or studied outside the United States, and other data indicate that very few teachers-in-training (less than 1%) manage to study abroad as undergraduates.

My report's recommendations on foreign language requirements are more detailed than the CCSSO's: That significant foreign language competence be required in teacher training for all humanities and social science fields, for all education levels, and, because foreign languages are being taught increasingly in elementary schools, that a separate endorsement be prepared for K-6 foreign language instruction.

Conclusion

State Boards of Education are in a position to provide critical leadership on these very important issues related to global competence and understanding, at a time when most students will in some way eventually be impacted by, and will be impacting, world-wide developments. Yet over and over again in my interviews I heard about constraints imposed by state certification requirements and standards. The time has come for State Boards of Education to take action to encourage – indeed, require – inclusion of foreign language and related area and international study for all teachers and their students.

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¹ Several papers resulting from the project, and more information about the methodology, can be found at www.internationaledadvice.org.