

# Think Big!

## How global education can benefit your students and staff

By Stephanie Downey, Jason Van Heukelum, and Michael Thier

Few U.S. classrooms—let alone schools and districts—display the commitment necessary for global education. In elementary or secondary schools, opportunities to participate in global education programs such as International Baccalaureate or the Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education are bleak: Fewer than 2 percent of U.S. public schools offer such programs. Among the rare schools where such opportunities exist, a study from the journal *Educational Policy* shows participation to favor students who are wealthy and white.

Global education infuses world culture, foreign language, history, and current events into the core curriculum. When it is done well, teachers layer global education into students' experience throughout the day, as they learn traditional academic subjects.

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#### From the 3 Rs to the 5 Cs

At Frederick Douglass Elementary School in Winchester, Virginia, where co-author Stephanie Downey is principal, approximately 60 percent of the students receive a free or reduced-price lunch; it is a high-poverty district. At Frederick Douglass, teaching students to think globally evolved from the dual-language program started more than a year ago. As the school cultivated bilingual students, the administration and teachers saw students thinking in broader terms about the world around them.

A transformation was happening in which teachers' primary responsibility went from teaching the 3 Rs to the 5 Cs, which are Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, and Citizens who think globally.

Before committing to a global education program, Frederick Douglass, like many schools around the country, taught students about empathy and character. But there was a gap: Teachers can instruct students to be kind to one another, but that doesn't necessarily instill a broader respect for culture and diversity. Global education has been a way to inculcate empathy at Frederick Douglass, while recognizing differences. For example, empathy is one of Frederick Douglass' global competencies this school year. A Frederick Douglass teacher from Puerto Rico recently asked her class to adopt a Caribbean

school impacted by Hurricane Maria. Her students gathered and sent supplies the Caribbean students would need, and the island school sent back pictures and shared stories via Skype about their school day and life outside of school. The relationship born of empathy broadened each school's experience and perspective.

Global education also includes inviting international teachers into the classroom. Doing so can be challenging, especially for disadvantaged districts. So, Frederick Douglass Elementary and its district

rely on a third party called Participate, which has not only helped find certified foreign-language teachers but also put in place online professional development that all teachers can access. The PD modules provide teachers access to lesson plans and resources, and teachers earn digital badges to show they've become skilled at applying global concepts in their classes.

#### Hurdling the Barriers to Global Education

There are two barriers to implementing a global program:

1. Preparing enough teachers as global educators.
2. Generating sufficient community buy-in to launch a program.

To address the first barrier, schools should alter their typical blueprints, which treat reading, writing, and





arithmetic as essential, and global education as a nice add-on. A school system should design its curriculum with skills and attributes that promote global experiences for students and teachers.

Teacher and virtual exchange programs are available through organizations such as the Flat Classroom Project, iEarn, Participate, TakingITGlobal, or World View at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Competitions from the World Affairs Council or World Savvy can introduce students and teachers to myriad concepts and cultures. Resources such as these help schools certify their teachers as global educators through the Teachers College Global Competence Certificate, George Mason University's degrees in international education, or the Global Education Conference.

Making the shift to global education means convincing parents that global competencies yield student success in the three Rs. At Frederick Douglass, staff and teachers have seen students' level of interest rise, and this increased engagement translates into better comprehension and results. But some parents may still ask, "Isn't global education happening in social studies?"

In response, leaders should develop a committee of teachers, administrators, and staff to mitigate these concerns with a plan that maps global competencies onto an established curriculum. This approach makes it easier for students, teachers, and parents to see the 21st century's five Cs coexisting with the traditional three Rs.

Based on our experience and the application of these concepts by colleagues in other districts and states, implementing global education enables students—regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or language—to find success in the areas celebrated most by educators. **P**

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