

# Global Competence Is a 21st Century Imperative

*The 21st century isn't coming; it's already here. And our students have the opportunity and challenge of living and working in a diverse and rapidly changing world. Public schools must prepare our young people to understand and address global issues, and educators must re-examine their teaching strategies and curriculum so that all students can thrive in this global and interdependent society.*

—NEA President Dennis Van Roekel

**T**here is widespread recognition that a thorough understanding of global issues is critical to the United States' efforts to promote democratic principles and social justice, improve our economic competitiveness, and provide leadership in innovation and creativity.



The National Education Association

(NEA) believes public education, the cornerstone of our republic, is the only avenue through which today's students—tomorrow's workers—can attain global competence.

Our increasingly interconnected and interdependent global society mandates that American students be educated to develop habits of the mind that embrace tolerance, a commitment to cooperation, an appreciation of our common humanity, and a sense of responsibility—key elements of global competence. However, not enough is being done in public schools and classrooms to expose students to global issues. Research shows that most American students, low-income and minority groups in particular, lag behind their peers in other countries in their knowledge of world geography, foreign languages, and cultures.<sup>1</sup>

## What is global competence?

Global competence refers to the acquisition of in-depth knowledge and understanding of international issues, an appreciation of and ability to learn and work with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, proficiency in a foreign language, and skills to function

productively in an interdependent world community. This definition contains four basic elements:

- **International awareness.** This constitutes the knowledge and understanding of world history, socioeconomic and political systems, and other global events. This awareness includes the understanding that local and national events can have international implications. An individual who is aware of the broader world environment also recognizes that an individual's actions can affect others beyond one's own borders.
- **Appreciation of cultural diversity.** This entails the ability to know, understand, and appreciate people from other cultures along with the capacity to acknowledge other points of view about pressing world issues. Awareness and appreciation of cross-cultural differences, and the willingness to accept those differences, opens doors for opportunities to engage in productive and respectful cross-cultural relations.
- **Proficiency in foreign languages.** The ability to understand, read, write, and speak in more than one language enhances cross-cultural communication skills. The knowledge of additional languages opens doors to the understanding of other cultures and people who speak those languages.
- **Competitive skills.** The ability to compete globally entails the acquisition of extensive knowledge of international issues. To be able to compete, students need high-level thinking skills that enhance creativity and innovation. Students who gain a thorough understanding of the economic, social, and technological changes taking place across the globe enhance their ability to compete in the worldwide marketplace.