

The "World" is Sitting in Our Classrooms

The word *globalization* rolls off our tongues effortlessly these days. Technological advances, business interdependence, and communication across international borders have spawned a need for schools to prepare young people to become global citizens. Principals and teachers all over the country are working tirelessly to prepare our children for the future; but unless someone has discovered a universal crystal ball, we don't quite know what that means. What we do know is that schools will need to ensure that children have equal access to a high-quality preK–12 education, be technologically and culturally savvy, and be able to communicate in other languages.

As we look toward shaping our children for the future, we must recognize and appreciate the "world" that we have in our K–12 public schools. Today's classrooms are a mix of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds that offer rich and varied experiences to complement our schools. Sixty percent of public school students are White, 18% are Hispanic, 16% are Black, and 4% are Asian. Twenty-two percent of today's students have at least one foreign-born parent, and 6% are foreign-born themselves, while 10 million school-age children speak a language other than English at home.

A Step Beyond Multiculturalism

Yet with the growing diversity in our country, our schools have a long way to go. Much has been made about the need to close the achievement gap, but there also is a cultural gap that exists in our schools. Too often schools have celebrated diverse cultures in isolation rather than integrating them into the whole-school curriculum. We must take a step beyond just celebrating heritage days and months and strive to create learning communities that embrace diversity and different learning styles and are inclusive of all backgrounds. As our communities become much more diverse, our schools must become culturally literate and allow us to learn valuable lessons from children who have experiences different than our own.

Schools must also reach out to parents who want the best education for their children but who are unable to communicate



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with principals and teachers. Translating resources into different languages (as many districts already do), providing professional development for school personnel, and hiring bilingual specialists to address the needs of the diversified population requires a commitment from policymakers to provide schools with the proper funding.

Investment in a Diverse Future

There's potential for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to help close the achievement and cultural gaps in our schools, but its one-size-fits-all approach does nothing to address our schools' increasingly diverse populations. The ESEA draft bill produced by the House Education and Labor Committee still falls short in its ability to provide a reasonable provision for English language learners (ELLs), who are at a significant disadvantage in benefiting from the curriculum. It is inconceivable to test students in a language in which they are not proficient and to include their test scores in the determination of adequate yearly progress. States and school districts should have maximum flexibility in addressing the assessment and learning of ELLs and, if necessary, be allowed to provide alternative assessments to students still learning English.

Representatives from NAESP and NASSP recently testified on Capitol Hill to urge Congress to make ESEA a more effective and less punitive law. Now it's time for lawmakers to hear from the rest of our 60,000 members. Let them hear from the public school principals who are working hard to implement a law that requires more flexibility and funding. We urge all of our members to call the offices of their federal legislators to advocate for crucial changes to a law that will affect many generations of children.

We educators have a responsibility to help our students become more culturally literate. And lawmakers have a responsibility to support schools in their mandate to educate an increasingly diverse population to high standards. Our classrooms are full of global representatives. Learning lessons from our diverse school population will enable our children to become informed and active citizens of the world community.