The improvement of international education in U.S. schools cries out for strong national leadership. Ms. Kagan and Ms. Stewart, guest editors of this special section, make the case that helping students become globally competent citizens is crucial to the future prosperity and security of the United States, and they discuss strategies for making this happen.

THROUGOUT this special section, as in many of the documents used in its preparation, the call for a greater focus on international education (IE) is sounded loudly. The contributors to this section have used the terms international education and international studies to refer to the intentional preparation of American students — prekindergarten through college — to be citizens, workers, and leaders in the interconnected world of the 21st century.

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Given that the nation’s political and economic leaders have voiced concerns that we are not preparing our students to succeed in a globalized world and that we have a system of universal K-12 public education in which some schools have adopted some excellent and diverse IE models, one might think that IE is a “no brainer”! It is not. In contemporary America, IE is the coveted jewel of a limited number of forward-looking academics, practitioners, and advocates. According to Robert Scott, president of Adelphi University, IE has been the subject of “many calls, but little action,” with global illiteracy the result.1

Many reports and commissions have noted the problem, including the Perkins Commission on Languages and International Studies in the 1970s; the Carter Administration’s Simon Commission, which called for significantly greater attention to foreign languages; reports from the American Council on Education in the 1980s calling for the internationalization of higher education; and reports from the Asia Society and the National Geographic Society in 2001 and 2002 respectively. Both the Clinton Administration and the current Bush Administration have supported an emphasis on IE. In 2002, at the first States Institute on International Education in the Schools, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige declared that “to meet our goal to leave no child behind, we must shift our focus from current practice and encourage programs that introduce our students to international studies earlier in their education, starting in kindergarten.”

To be sure, the press for international education is not entirely new, with some of the clarion calls being backed by action, especially in higher education. For 50 years the federal government has supported, primarily for national security purposes, the development of area studies, international studies, and language centers to produce scholars and experts in major world regions. Moreover, in the past 15 years, many higher education institutions have been trying to “internationalize” their curriculum, to encourage students to study abroad, and to promote the international exchange of faculty. Although K-12 education lags behind higher education, some states have added language to their social studies standards that encourages teaching about world regions, history, geography, or religions.

Despite these advances, so far there has been little change in K-12 classrooms or in the general state of American students’ knowledge of the world. Why have American schools been so inward looking? One can speculate on many possible reasons for this tendency — geography, economy, history, ideology. Compared to European countries, the United States is a huge continental landmass, isolated by two enormous oceans. Its large domestic market has meant that international trade was, until recently, a relatively small part of the economy. New immigrants, fleeing repression at home, often wanted to forget where they had come from, which corresponded well with the mission of U.S. schools to create a new nation by “Americanizing” these immigrants. Two world wars fueled Americans’ sense of isolationism and contributed to intense suspicion of those who spoke languages other than English.

In addition, structural factors of the U.S. education system have contributed to the lack of emphasis on IE. The decentralized, highly local nature of educational decision making has led schools to focus on state and local history and affairs. And, in recent years, the focus of accountability systems on basic skills has inadvertently resulted in a narrowing of curricula and expenditures in many schools. The lack of funding for innovation, capacity building, or research for effective IE has limited its growth, despite increasing awareness and interest.

This lack of widespread interest in international education in the United States, while troublesome in and of itself, is compounded by growing commitments to international education being made by other nations. The European Union is expanding language instruction to begin at age 7 and is encouraging partnerships between schools within Europe and those from other countries. Australia has had a decadelong national initiative to add the teaching of Asian languages, history, and culture to all its schools. Some countries in East Asia are adding “international skills” — English language, world history and geography, and technology — to their curricula.

This is not to say that other nations are exempt from educational isolationism; all countries’ education systems have traditionally focused on their own history and culture to varying degrees. Indeed, in some parts of the world, both formal and informal education produce ethnocentrism and even outright hatred for other groups.1 In the past decade, however, most industrialized countries have been strengthening their students’ knowledge of other cultures and languages.

In developing this special section, we sought to show several things. First, the U.S. lags behind other countries in imparting to its students the skills needed to be citizens and workers in the 21st-century global age. Second, the elements necessary for significant educa-
tion reform with regard to IE are not yet firmly in place; there is, as yet, no uniform vision or mobilized intellectual/practical/financial infrastructure to support its advancement.

In addition to briefly summarizing its content, we want to conclude this special section by advancing our own thesis on what is needed to increase the focus on IE in American schools, based on the work of Julius Richmond, M.D., professor emeritus at Harvard and former U.S. surgeon general. Exhibiting wisdom far greater than our own, Dr. Richmond presciently realized that any social revolution needs three things: 1) a codified knowledge base, 2) public will for change, and 3) a social strategy. We regard IE as a necessary social and educational revolution and address its current status in light of Dr. Richmond’s three conditions for reform.

THE KNOWLEDGE BASE

As the articles in this special section clearly indicate, there is an increasingly strong rationale for, and mounting concern about, IE in our schools. At its most narrow construction, the rationale for IE focuses on the rudimentary knowledge base of American students. Seminal studies by the National Commission on Asia in the Schools found that 25% of college-bound high school students surveyed did not know the name of the ocean that separates the United States from Asia and that 80% did not know that India is the world’s largest democracy or who Mao Zedong was.4 And we are incredulous at the findings from the National Geographic Society/Roper survey that, among the students from eight countries surveyed, those attending American schools were the second most poorly informed about world affairs or geography. What might we expect when our students cannot even identify the location of Afghanistan or Israel (two nations not exactly ignored by the media), but know that a recent “Survivor” show was shot in the South Pacific?5 Clearly, we have a problem.

The challenge only begins here. We live in a time when the amount of information available to us is expanding at unprecedented rates: 24-hour newscasts, 24-7 Internet availability, prolific growth in the numbers of cable TV channels, just to mention a few. The problem today is not a lack of information; rather, it is a lack of knowledge. Carlos Fuentes notes that “the greatest challenge facing modern society and civilization is how to cope with and how to transform information to knowledge.”6 So our educational vision in general, and for IE in particular, must not be constrained by the mere acquisition of facts. The question facing educators today is less about the mastery of world geography or current events or any topical factoids, however critical they may be, than about integrating and synthesizing exponentially increasing amounts of information in a way that addresses issues in civic and global life.

The larger issue inherent in our current Zeitgeist is, of course, the need to fundamentally reexamine the intents of American education. In the spring of 2004, Harvard University released the report of its first major review of its undergraduate curriculum in almost 30 years. The report concludes that in a fast-changing world, students urgently need knowledge of a wider range of subjects, including a deeper understanding of the principles of science and a far greater grasp of international affairs. With regard to the latter, the study recommends significant reforms of the undergraduate curriculum to ensure greater international knowledge and experience and stronger foreign language skills for graduates who will be “globally competent.” Today’s students “need to be able to appreciate other cultures and to work expertly in other countries or as part of an international team.”7

But the issue the Harvard curriculum review sought to address is not just a question that applies to the education of elite students. As we evaluate the status of our IE knowledge base, we must admit that our work seeks more to identify fundamental issues of American education than to determine which continents to “teach” in geography. Our work is really about deciding what it means to be an educated citizen in the 21st century.

The stakes are obviously very high. We need a broad discussion of educational purpose and rigorous experimentation on a wide range of related issues, among them those suggested by the articles contained herein. How could we synthesize the efforts to reform our ineffective high schools with those to internationalize the curriculum (Jackson)? What should our stance be with respect to foreign language instruction, and how could we design programs that are far more effective in producing language proficiency (Met)? How could we educate teachers for a global curriculum (Kelly)? We need to address these issues within the broader context of society as well, however. Students in much of the world today live in an increasingly media- and technology-saturated environment. How could we optimize the
use of media and information technologies to promote curiosity about the world and empathy toward other cultures, rather than hatred or cultural hegemony (War-tella and Knell, and Roberts)?

In short, as we consider the need to expand the IE knowledge base, we are calling on our society to redefine the purposes of American education to meet the needs of the new century and to address the pedagogical and curricular correlates that will enable such purposes to be achieved.

**PUBLIC WILL**

At national conferences today, irrespective of the topic, international issues are increasingly being addressed, if not showcased. Scientists, economists, and political leaders all operate in a global context. And after 9/11, who among the American public can fail to acknowledge the importance of world affairs to our nation? Although this emphasis on the world outside our borders has not yet resulted in a strong or sustained focus on IE, as former governors Hunt and Engler point out, international education is beginning to elicit public support for three diverse yet equally critical imperatives: the economic imperative, the security imperative, and the citizenship imperative.

**The economic imperative.** The global economy is here to stay. The American economy is deeply intertwined with those of countries around the world through imports, exports, and overseas and domestic investment. Even small companies that do not label themselves as international corporations are engaged globally. These trends, already strong, are likely to increase as two-thirds of the world’s purchasing power and 95% of the world’s consumers exist outside the U.S.8 Students must be ready to work in a highly competitive international economic environment. Businesses need employees who can think globally.? These economic realities have not escaped the attention of state governors and opinion leaders. Hoping to keep their economies strong, governors and their states’ business leaders are key advocates for greater emphasis on IE and are strong shapers of public will.

**The security imperative.** The launch of Sputnik in 1957 and the attacks of September 11 acted as loud wake-up calls, signaling to the American people that foreign languages and international and cross-cultural understanding are key to our national security. International studies could no longer be restricted to an educated elite or the Foreign Service corps. To the contrary, in the face of global misunderstanding, international education is an important component of long-term security.

Inherent in a growing commitment to international education is the understanding that it needs to be thought of as a two-way street in order to address the tremendous misinformation about the U.S. that circulates in many parts of the world. National security and foreign policy need a foundation in educational, cultural, and exchange activities that promote dialogue, cross-cultural understanding, and the creation of direct personal and institutional relationships.

With regard to individual security, issues such as global climate change or the worldwide HIV/AIDS epidemic have no respect for political borders. The public understands, however reluctant it might be to admit it, that some of the world’s most penetrating challenges demand international knowledge and cooperation for their solution.

**The citizenship imperative.** Dramatic demographic changes in the U.S., especially the increasing diversity of our classrooms and workplaces, with growing Hispanic and Asian populations living in even very small communities, mean that all citizens need to know more about the cultures represented at school and at work. And, in an age when decisions made halfway around the world can sometimes have a far greater impact than decisions made by local town councils, American citizens will be called on to debate and vote on issues that require international knowledge. Moreover, as the richest and most powerful na-
tion in the world, the United States is deeply involved in economic, political, and social events around the globe. Our own future is inextricably tied to the solution of many political and humanitarian crises. In short, the bright line between “domestic” and “international” is becoming blurred. American students need to become not only good citizens of the United States, but good citizens of the world.

These imperatives provide strong rationale for the public to increase its support for improving IE in our schools. The fact that such public will has taken root only sparsely is a challenge but does not diminish our belief in the strong potential for success, if planned and mobilized for correctly. Susan Bales affirms this and offers concrete suggestions for the necessary strengthening of the public will.

SOCIAL STRATEGY

Clearly there is a critical need for strategies that will modernize our schools to prepare students for the opportunities and challenges of the global age. Scholars and practitioners have long debated the efficacy of different change strategies — from public information campaigns, to litigation, to social protest, to markets, and so on. John Gardner, former U.S. secretary of health, education, and welfare and founder of Common Cause and Independent Sector, argued that much social innovation in the United States proceeds in stages. Most innovations begin with small-scale experiments in local communities. Successful efforts begin to be emulated by other locales and, later, by pioneering states — “the laboratories of our democracy.” Once six to 10 states have adopted an approach and tested it on a larger scale, other states and the federal government will begin to act. Seen in this perspective, the increasing numbers of schools and states that are beginning to take up international education, as illustrated in the article by Ted Sanders and Vivien Stewart and by the sidebar on pages 234-35, is encouraging.

Still, we are at an early stage in the development of real capacity in the field of IE. What strategies would move reform from another round of “many calls, but little action” to more systematic development of IE on a nationwide scale? We believe that multiple strategies are needed to make meaningful change, particularly when the issues are latent and the stakes are high. To that end, and building on the recommendations offered in the preceding articles, we propose a set of broad strategic approaches, followed by more specific recommendations to build capacity in this field.

STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

In every social or educational movement, different sectors need to be mobilized. First, we must recognize that educators alone cannot enlist support for IE. Since the call for change in education often comes from the “demand” side (parents, students, and community members) rather than the “supply” side (the school system), governors and business leaders who understand how rapidly the world is changing need to communicate the long-term consequences of our failure to prepare students to adapt to these changes. Second, we need to build networks, both human and technological, that link the hundreds of grassroots local innovators, so that teachers and school leaders can learn from one another, share curriculum and resources, and begin to assess the effectiveness of different approaches.

Third, since states are in the forefront both of education reform and of responding to the challenges of globalization, policy makers need to create five-year plans to integrate IE into their education and economic policies and programs to ensure that their high school graduates are prepared for this global age. In doing so, state policy makers are likely to find willing partners in their corporate, university, cultural, and heritage communities. Fourth, at the national level, the President, Congress, and the U.S. Departments of State, Defense, Commerce, and Education need to urgently connect our policies for advancing international relations and economic growth to our nation’s education agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING CAPACITY IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

As the public will to improve IE increases and different sectors are mobilized, it will be important to build the capacity to deliver international education on a large scale. We have identified a set of four policy and program actions that will help to accomplish this objective.

An effective corps of teachers must be developed in every state to infuse all the core curriculum areas with international content. In the Sputnik era, our nation made an important commitment to science and math education via the National Science Foundation. A similar national commitment to prepare teachers to promote international knowledge and language skills is now needed. The Higher Education Act, due to be
reauthorized next year, provides an important vehicle for modernizing teacher preparation and professional development. Allowing Title II and Title VI funds to create K-16 partnerships for international teaching excellence and to develop international professional development opportunities, including study abroad and online courses for teachers and school leaders, could create critical capacity for schools.

A K-16 pipeline for major world languages must be built. In the longer term, our education policies should encourage all students to learn a second language, as do those of other industrial countries. In the shorter term, our diplomatic and defense communities urgently need a K-16 pipeline to produce proficient speakers of critical languages, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Farsi, and Russian. To increase our capacity to communicate in languages other than English, the federal government should provide serious incentives to begin language study earlier (elementary school), to promote innovative uses of technology, to conduct experiments with different approaches to language learning, to build on the language resources in our heritage communities, and to recruit and train teachers in less commonly taught languages.

We must leverage media and technology resources to bring the world to our students. In the last decade, billions of private and public sector dollars have been invested to wire schools, build Web resources, open the airwaves and TV spectrum to new channels, and broadcast high-quality media to schools and communities. However, all of this has had a negligible impact on children’s and teachers’ knowledge of the world outside our borders. Private and public resources in those areas must be leveraged to stimulate new international content in vehicles such as virtual high schools; to encourage school-to-school partnerships with schools in other parts of the world; to prime partnerships between universities, corporations, and K-12 schools; and to utilize public television and radio — all to educate young Americans about the world.

International education must be incorporated into existing major education reform initiatives. Any definition of educational excellence in the 21st century must include international knowledge and skills. Therefore, a focus on IE needs to be infused into a range of federal and state domestic and international programs (e.g., vocational education and high school reform, literacy and after-school programs, leadership development, research, and international exchange). This would provide needed resources to bring to scale local best prac-

Portraits of Pioneering Schools

The following schools were the inaugural recipients of the Goldman Sachs Foundation Prizes for Excellence in International Education in November 2003. They were selected from a national pool of applicants by a distinguished jury. Chosen for their innovation and effectiveness, these pioneering schools engage teachers and students in learning about other world regions, cultures, and languages.

John Stanford International School (JSIS) is a public K-5 bilingual-immersion school in Seattle. Opened in the fall of 2000, the school serves approximately 400 students; 41% of the student body is white, 29% Hispanic, 22% Asian or Pacific Islander, 7% African American, and 1% other.

The JSIS immersion program emphasizes attaining social and academic fluency in at least one world language — students may elect to learn either Spanish or Japanese. Immersion teachers, or their assistants, must be native speakers. The concepts learned in core courses are reinforced in both English and the chosen foreign language. JSIS students spend half their days studying math, science, culture, and literacy in their chosen world language and the other half learning reading, writing, and social studies in English. International content appears across all curricular areas. A local arts organization provides artists in residence to teach students the language of world dance, music, and visual art.

JSIS serves as one of Seattle’s centers for new immigrant students and offers instruction in English as a second language for children during school hours and evening courses for their parents. The school has demonstrated success both in language acquisition and academic achievement.

Partnerships with local international businesses, as well as curriculum support from the University of Washington, have helped the development of the school. A new partnership with a small school in Puerta Vallarta, Mexico, has also been established. JSIS students have learned about the children of Puerta Vallarta’s garbage pickers, have helped to raise money for their partner
Our purpose in editing this special section, and the forthcoming section to appear next year at this time, is to heighten awareness of international education and, we hope, to provoke the discourse that is necessary to move a thoughtful, strategic agenda forward. To return to Dr. Richmond’s analysis of reform, our knowledge base is emerging, though far more intensive work is needed. The requisite ingredients for strengthening the public will — the economic, security, and citizenship imperatives — are present and should be quite powerful elicitors of public commitment to IE reform. Discerning how to move this agenda forward with multiple populations and constituents is in order, posthaste. Finally, with regard to strategy, we have discussed a range of both broad and specific approaches that might be used as springboards from which to create a more globally competent citizenry. It is to this end that this work is dedicated.

The issue of IE reform cries out for strong national leadership. It is deeply intertwined with the future prosperity and security of our nation. We are at a crossroads in our nation’s social and intellectual history; this era’s crisis, not even apparent to many, is one of inattention to changing needs in a new global age. It is one that stands begging for legitimacy and action.

**ETHS offers world language courses in Japanese, Hebrew, and Latin in addition to Spanish, French, and German. Technology is used to connect language classes to native speakers and for online discussions with students in other countries, such as Pakistan and Zimbabwe. The quality of the program stems from the school’s commitment to professional development. The school has established relationships with area studies centers at three local universities and with the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations to give teachers access to scholarship and expertise. ETHS is recognized as a leading example of best practices in international education, featuring “teaching and learning” teams for curriculum development and emphasizing community outreach by students. In 2003 ETHS sponsored a Global Studies conference for schools in Illinois to share curriculum resources and teaching strategies. — SLK and VS**


**4. National Commission on Asia in the Schools, Asia in the Schools: Preparing Young Americans for Today’s Interconnected World (New York: Asia Society, 2001).**


