

Global Awareness in the Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools

How does the adaptive leader forge a district vision for a Global future? This was the question posed at the M.A.S.S Leadership Academy conference in the fall of 2007. This was also the beginning of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District's quest for Global Awareness in its own schools. This Global Education conference was attended by teacher leaders of all disciplines. Speakers discussed the importance of incorporating appropriate experiences in the curriculum to prepare our students to be globally aware citizens. Panels, including students, talked about how their high school experiences with travel exchanges and working towards a global competency in high school prepared them for an increasingly flat world. At these conferences the seeds were planted for Acton's own Global Education initiative which continued with another conference this past fall.

Many educators argue that schools and their curricula mirror society in the sense that the sources or engines of change within schools are based on forces or movements outside the educational system and that social change within the society provides the initiative for educational change. In recent years, this change has taken the form of rapid globalization of the American society. Therefore, the raising of global awareness in our schools has become the necessary next step in preparing our students for the world in which they must function. In schools, global awareness can begin with the cultivation of cross-cultural understanding, including the skill of perspective-taking. In addition, it will be necessary to study those problems and issues that cut across national boundaries as they impact the interconnectedness of various systems that comprise different cultures. In speaking of 21st century skills, the conversation is not complete without the inclusion of global awareness education.

Susan Horn, the district's Assistant Superintendent, has led the charge for Global Awareness in the district. Susan had the opportunity to travel to China last spring. During her trip she traveled the country and shared experiences in education with Chinese teachers and administrators. After returning from her trip, Susan enlisted another group of teachers to attend a second M.A.S.S leadership academy on Global Education. Those who attended listened intently to the keynote speaker, Dr. CanErbil, Assistant Professor of Economics at Brandeis University. He discussed the day's theme: Global is the New Local: Living and Learning in an Interconnected World.

From this fall's conference, the district's Global Awareness Steering Committee was formed, headed by the committee chair Sinikka Gary. This new committee has met several times throughout the school year. Its members include Susan Horn, Sinikka Gary, Priscilla Kotyk, Allison Warren, Christopher Clinton, Deborah Bookis, Eileen Sullivan, Karen Sonner, Audra Kaplan, Wioletta Pawlowska, and Claire Dix. This year, the Global Awareness Committee's charge was to discuss how the district personally defines Global Awareness, explore what currently goes on regarding global themes throughout the district and focus the district's direction for future growth. The committee found that many exciting opportunities already exist within the district to prepare our students with a global understanding. There are cultural festivals throughout the district celebrating the Chinese New Year and Diwali. Global themes are embedded throughout the district's curriculum and travel exchanges and tours are exciting students to travel abroad and experience new cultures. The high school language department also recently included classes in Mandarin, and the Junior High school is expected to include Mandarin classes this upcoming fall.

The committee has continued its work throughout the spring on developing a mission and action plan to help focus work in the coming years. It has defined Global Awareness as a process that leads to understanding of a rapidly transforming world. We want our students to become compassionate, effective, and knowledgeable citizens who will fully participate in a global society. In order to do this, our students must develop cross cultural understandings, realize the impact of global and regional resources, and recognize the interconnections of local and global decisions.

Another group of teachers and administrators is scheduled to attend a leadership conference on May 1st, *21st Century Administrators Leading Globally Minded Districts*. We are excited about what new ideas this Global Awareness initiative will bring to the district. In the future we intend to educate our staff and students to be more globally aware citizens and look forward to expanding curriculum and opportunities for students, and professional development for staff.

In our schools we recognize the need to respond to the changing society in which we live as well as prepare our students for a society that is still evolving. Moreover we must acknowledge that role as the very essence of curriculum development, leading the evolution of schooling in line with the changing society, and emphasizing the key role that curriculum development plays in education.

Susan Horn – Assistant Superintendent
Sinikka Gary – Global Awareness Chairperson