
Findings

The Michigan Commission on Asia in the Schools finds that Michigan’s public schools lack emphasis on teaching about Asia. However, organizations and networks exist to support and to stimulate more Asian studies in the classroom.

Michigan high school graduates know little about Asia and its languages.

- Michigan students are no different than students in other states. Our review revealed that Michigan students were no better informed than those surveyed nationally by the Asia Society. That national survey found that 80% percent of the students could not identify India as the most populous democracy in the world.
- Michigan state standards and assessments do not emphasize Asian knowledge; therefore, Asian-related material is not *systematically* included in coursework. Only those teachers with a personal interest include more than rudimentary instruction on Asian-related topics. As one teacher remarked, “Benchmarks are driving global studies out of schools.”
- State assessment exam questions do not address Asian-related topics. Teachers asserted that only by adding questions on Asian-related topics to the state assessment exam would instruction on Asia increase significantly.
- Japanese is the most commonly taught Asian language in the United States. However, fewer than 95 of the over 3800 public schools in Michigan offer language instruction in Japanese, a language spoken by 120 million people. But virtually every Michigan school district offers foreign language instruction in European languages. In the United States, over one million students study French – a language spoken by about 70 million people. Just 50,000 study Chinese – a language spoken by more than 1.2 billion people.

Michigan is home to premier scholars, language experts, and research centers on Asia at its major universities, yet Michigan schools do not benefit from their resources.

- Both the University of Michigan and Michigan State University have nationally recognized Asian Studies scholars available to work with teachers and intermediate school districts, but many teachers are unaware of these resources. Teachers were eager to hear about speakers, Web sites, materials, and appropriate activities to integrate more Asian-related topics into their lesson plans.
- University-created materials may not be tailored for K-12 use but could be with further assistance from K-12 teachers. Teachers asked for handbooks of up-to-date and accurate information.
- Using these rich resources and its foresight to promote more education about Asia, Michigan can be a national leader in broadening school curricula to include more international themes.
- The Internet can be an effective and easily accessible medium for disseminating materials, professional development tools, and current information about Asia. Web-based networks can easily link Asian subject experts and teachers inexpensively.

“In this globalized era, the educated person must have knowledge and understanding of the world’s diverse countries, cultures, and peoples, the majority of whom live in Asia. The University of Michigan is proud of our 150 years of involvement with Asia, Asians, and Asian studies, and will be pleased to do our part to assist in this important state initiative.”

Mary Sue Coleman,
President, University of
Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

Without future employees with international knowledge, language expertise, and an understanding of foreign affairs, Michigan businesses will be less competitive and our nation less effective abroad.

- National security specialists are concerned about the knowledge potential employees have about world affairs and the lack of Asian language speakers. In a recent address to the Asia Society members in New York, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said of the *Asia in the Schools* effort, “I applaud your national campaign to improve teaching about Asia in our schools. The rising generation of young people here and in Asia needs to learn much more about each other because they will be building and sharing the same future.”
- Many state and local educational policy makers are not informed about the importance of teaching Michigan students about Asia and Asian-related affairs, as these policymakers have not made teaching about Asia an educational priority.
- Business and economic leaders understand that employees must be proficient in Asian and international affairs to maintain competitiveness. As Janny Lu, President & CEO of Ebinger/JETS Manufacturing Company (Brighton, MI), said, “The success of my business depends on sales and support personnel who can communicate well with Chinese suppliers. Without an appreciation for cultural nuances, we cannot do business profitably in China.”
- Michigan’s leadership in establishing a state Commission to review and recommend action steps to improve teaching and learning about Asia is a first step in bringing attention to the issue and convincing policy makers to call for more attention to Asia in classrooms.

Teachers lack preparation and professional development opportunities in Asian-related subjects.

- To receive entry-level certification, Michigan teachers are not required to have specific knowledge about Asia. Even in the specialty areas of social studies, political science, and history, there is no requirement for coursework in Asian studies.
- Teachers feel unprepared to teach about Asia because they lack knowledge and familiarity with the topics. There is little financial or professional support for teachers to seek training to teach these subjects.
- In Michigan, only three universities train certified Japanese language instructors, and the number of graduates continues to decline.
- Michigan State University and the University of Michigan offer several years of instruction in many Asian languages: four at Michigan State University and seventeen at the University of Michigan. Teacher preparation programs could easily take advantage of these courses to train language instructors better.

New web-based technologies are now available to network and train educators and expose students to Asian languages, cultures, and subject matter.

- The Internet expands access to a myriad of materials, teacher tools, and information to help teachers teach about Asia. Teachers have said, however, that they are overwhelmed with the task of determining which information is grade appropriate, accurate, and objective. An expert review and compilation of materials that should be used in the classroom would greatly assist teachers in bringing in more Asian topics into their classroom.

With international communication capabilities, schools can now use technology to share information and experiences with Michigan students and with students abroad. Teachers want assistance in integrating the use of technology into their lessons and activities.