

## Dana Curran Mortenson: Big world. Big need for global education



By Dana Curran Mortenson  
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The global reach of the two biggest stories of the year to date — the H1N1 flu virus and the economic crisis — has highlighted in a powerful way that many of our most pressing issues transcend national borders. From the economy to the environment, terrorism to health care, 21st-century challenges require leaders who are globally aware and informed.

Regrettably, most American students are not adequately prepared for this reality. A 2006 National Geographic/Ropers study revealed that only 37 percent of young Americans (ages 18 to 24) could find Iraq on a map. The same survey data showed us that a full 50 percent of young Americans could not find New York on a map.

Global awareness is critical not just to addressing global problems, but also in determining future success of our young people. In today's global economy, businesses are looking for graduates with advanced global and technical skills at younger ages. Students without access to advanced programs that help them build these skills are at a significant disadvantage in the competitive global marketplace.

**Minnesota has a reputation** as a national leader in innovative education initiatives. If we want to continue to provide our students with first-rate education, we must ensure that their world view expands, and not just in social studies, but across disciplines. A math class can calculate global migration patterns. A biology class can explore disease eradication. Mainstreaming global issues across disciplines can enhance young people's understanding of subjects such as math and science by placing them in a context that is more relevant to their everyday lives.

A desire to support this effort motivated me in 2002 to co-found World Savvy, a nonprofit organization devoted to educating and engaging youth in community and world affairs. Over the last seven years, World Savvy has worked with educators in San Francisco, New York and, as of fall 2008, the Twin Cities, to provide support, resources and programming to mainstream international affairs into education.

Last month, World Savvy hosted Minnesota's first annual World Affairs Challenge, an innovative academic program and competition on international affairs for middle and high school students. This event offered students the opportunity to discuss an issue of vital interest in their community and around the world.

More than 100 students from 11 Twin Cities schools came together at Macalester College to present solutions related to this year's central theme of human migration to nearly 50 volunteer judges from the community. Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Rep. Betty McCollum both attended to share their perspectives on the importance of global citizenship.

**The enthusiasm** from students, parents and community leaders at this year's World Affairs Challenge demonstrates that our community is ready to embrace a global perspective; however, further investment is necessary to truly mainstream global education into curriculum. This effort requires that teachers, who are already dealing with growing class sizes and pressure to meet state standards, have access to resources and training to effectively bring global issues into their classrooms.

Parents and communities must also understand the importance of global education and support programs that provide students with more opportunities to explore global issues. Global education is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity, and we must work to ensure that our students feel connected to the world at large and are prepared to tackle the global challenges of the 21st century.

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