

# Global Education and School Leaders' Role in Equitable Access for All Students: Synthesis of Two Qualitative Studies from Massachusetts, USA

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## Abstract

*Many argue that schools must incorporate global education in order to prepare students for lives in an increasingly globalized society. However, what remains is a system of inequity. While some well-funded, high achieving school districts provide opportunities for students to experience a global perspective in their learning, other districts are left to figure out how to prioritize global learning amidst pressures to show student achievement as evidenced by standardized measures. This paper synthesizes two studies and examines the problem of equity of access to global education with a two-fold emphasis: What conditions are necessary in school districts in order to implement equitable access to global learning? And what role does the superintendent (district level leader) play in the advancement of global education? The findings provide models to tackle the challenges of both implementation and equity of access.*

## 1. Introduction

For several years now, educational leaders have heard a call to action: schools must provide global learning opportunities in order to prepare students for successful lives in our increasingly globalized society. Students in kindergarten to grade 12 schools (K-12) need to be prepared to participate in the global economy, increase their cross-cultural understandings, build global awareness, and critically consider the goals of global citizenship and world peace.

The vital role of education in this process is highlighted by many in the field of education, including Linda Darling-Hammond [1] who described the crucial importance of learning and teaching in U.S. public education as the United States moves from a manufacturing economy to a much more complex

world of information technologies and knowledge work.

However, it is unclear if efforts to incorporate global learning opportunities are equitable or sustainable in schools. This paper provides models for school leaders—particularly those at the superintendent and building levels—in order that they may tackle the practical challenges to the implementation of global learning opportunities with a focus on ensuring that all students have access to relevant, 21<sup>st</sup> Century education.

The field of global education is characterized by multiple interests and definitions including those that emphasize economics, competition, cooperation, human rights and social justice. The Global Education Continuum [2] lays out five possible emphases regarding global education.

Global Education Continuum				
Economics	Competition	Cooperation	Human Rights	Social Justice
Survival/ Success of Nations, Groups, & Individuals	Superior Performance of Nations, Groups, & Individuals	Understanding, Teamwork for Global Problem Solving	Universal Rights for All Individuals	Social Responsibility to World Peace

**Figure 1. Global education continuum**

School leaders may ascribe to one or more of these emphases. The variance in global education emphases increases the importance of defining global education.

An operant definition of global education derives from the work of Hanvey [4, 5] and for the purpose of this paper is as follows: Global education in K-12 schools involves students in learning about the 21<sup>st</sup> Century interconnected world and themselves and engaging with the world and others through the development of knowledge, skills, experiences and understandings for successful global interactions and contributions [2, 4]. While there are states and schools across the United States incorporating global education, for example through social studies curricula, far fewer are dealing with the concept of

global systems through a global world view [3], infusing a global perspective in all curricula, or providing students with opportunities to develop a global perspective [2, 5].

In general, research in the area of global education is scant. There are some examples of successful emphasis on global education in school districts in the United States; however, few research studies have documented their progress or researched the role of the superintendent in the process.

This paper synthesizes the findings of two studies: Kilpatrick [6] researched the implementation of global education in two school districts in Massachusetts (one urban, one suburban) and suggested conditions necessary for the implementation of global education in schools. McCarthy [2] researched the roles and goals of superintendents in three Massachusetts school districts that were committed to the advancement of global education. Together, the studies found that for successful and sustained global learning opportunities, school districts will require leadership in superintendents who realize the necessity of expanding curriculum and capacity to reflect the new global reality that students inhabit mentally and physically.

## 2. Case Studies and Methods

Kilpatrick's study explores how Massachusetts public schools are incorporating global education in general, and more specifically, to understand both the process to implementation and the challenges faced by two Massachusetts high schools (one urban, one suburban) committed to implementing global education with an in-depth case study of each high school. Semi-structured interviews captured the views of teachers, students, administrators, and parents/community members associated with the process at the two high schools.

Kilpatrick's research questions are: *How are Massachusetts public schools implementing global education given competing demands and current educational policy? What was the process to implementing global education like at these two high schools, and how do they (teachers, administrators, community members) currently define global education and global citizenship?* The third question asked: *What challenges did these two high schools face in the process to implementation, and what challenges do they currently face in implementing global education?*

Kilpatrick's data sources include a review of the 2007 Massachusetts Department of Education (DESE) survey data from a group of voluntary Massachusetts school superintendents, semi-structured interviews in

the two high schools, and a review of documents associated with the process to implement global education in both schools.

The methods were chosen to align with Maxwell's [8] "process theory" of qualitative research. The case study design was chosen as a means of gathering in-depth qualitative data and developing "thick descriptions" [9]. Analysis of the interview data included several rounds of coding using the grounded theory approach [10] in which close reading of the interview and transcripts and field notes was used to discover categories and concepts. Then the use of axial coding identified relationships.

The interview questions served as the guide for the first round of analysis. The interview questions prompted interviewees to consider their own, personal definitions of concepts of global citizenship [7] and global education as well as their perceived significance of global citizenship and global education initiative in their schools. In the next round of analysis, Kilpatrick used open coding [10] to identify, name and categorize concepts and themes that emerged from the interviewees' responses, using their own words. Kilpatrick identified sub-codes or dimensions of each overarching code and finally, Kilpatrick employed axial coding to find connections across categories and sub-categories [10].

McCarthy's study looks at three public school superintendents whose districts exhibited evidence of commitment to global education. It focuses on three superintendents' perceptions of the role and goal of global education and the ways superintendents shape policies and practices for global education in their district. This study provides examples of districts with commitment to global education through the case studies involving superintendents and their district's work in global education for students.

In this qualitative study of three Massachusetts districts that have demonstrated commitment to global education, the two central research questions are: *What are superintendents' perceptions of the goal and role of global education in the 21st century? How do superintendents shape programs and policies to implement global education in K-12 districts?*

McCarthy explores each district's commitment to global education and especially how the superintendent in each district perceived the goal and role of global education and shaped programs and policies for implementation. McCarthy conducted interviews with each district superintendent and an educator or educators in each district, examined key district documents and websites, and observed global education practices in each district. McCarthy interviewed each superintendent twice- one at the beginning of the data collection and the second interview after the data collection was completed.

McCarthy asked the superintendents questions regarding why the superintendents decided to incorporate global education in their districts, how superintendents described or defined global education and how they went about incorporating global education in their districts. In each district, McCarthy interviewed one teacher and/or educator involved in global education: spending a day in each district observing global education practice and collecting artifacts including website data, photos, and mission, vision or philosophy statements regarding global education. Data was organized, coded and analyzed using the qualitative software program NVivo. The study produced case study narratives regarding each school superintendent and school district and included data descriptions and analysis.

McCarthy's study is located within a qualitative research methodological tradition and specifically with Eisner's connoisseurship model that has two major components, connoisseurship and criticism that combine to constitute inquiry [11]. Qualitative research with its emphasis on interviews and case studies is a fitting way to study superintendents' perceptions of global education as well as the manifestations of global education in school districts. In keeping with the practice of qualitative research, McCarthy included description of the process of data collection and analysis with cognizance of the researcher's role and any possible biases. McCarthy also aimed to echo the voice and experience of the study's superintendents who are emphasizing global education, the perspective of teachers/educators involved with global education as well as the practices of global education in their districts.

The insights that emerged from the research descriptions and analyses in each district are intended to contribute to understanding programs and policies regarding global education with an emphasis on the role of the superintendent. The study intends to benefit superintendents interested in pursuing global education as well as others interested in understanding and promoting global education.

The small number of case studies on global education is strikingly disproportionate to the mounting globalization that involves all systems, countries and peoples on the planet. The purpose of McCarthy's study is to contribute to understanding the process of global education in K-12 schools through the viewpoint and voices of superintendents, and teacher interviews, analysis of district documents and observation of district practices and collection of artifacts.

### 3. Visionary Leadership and Sustainable Models

Kilpatrick's purpose was to more clearly understand Massachusetts public schools' efforts to implement global education and to use in-depth case studies to concentrate on the experience of one urban and one suburban high school. The study documents the implementation of global education in two Massachusetts high schools. One school was influenced by the superintendent, and the other school's efforts centered on a group of teachers.

In the suburban high school, the process of implementing global education culminated in the creation of a Global Competence Program (GCP). The GCP provided students the opportunity to earn a certificate of completion at the time of graduation. In the urban school, superintendent leadership and a group of teachers committed to global education were the impetus for conversations and practices related to global education and specifically to the promotion of the teaching of foreign languages [6]. A comparison of the processes to implementation in both districts shows challenges to access as well as questions about the sustainability of global education models.

The suburban Global Competence Program (GCP) resulted in a special certificate and the requirements of the program included that students build a portfolio of courses, travel experiences, and community service requirements. The fact that many of the students in the GCP were highly competitive and were applying to elite colleges raised questions for some of the interviewees regarding the motivation of students to enter the program. The questions concerned whether the students were looking for a competitive edge for college admission or looking to transform their worldviews and become more culturally competent and understanding. It was also unclear as to how accessible the GCP was for all students given the travel requirement. However, the teachers and administrators who were interviewed regarding the GCP were clear that the intention of the program was for students to be prepared for global citizenship, which they described as a "moral imperative" [6] and an urgent need. Teachers and students both described the program as transformative, especially the travel experiences.

In the urban high school, the teachers and administrators who were interviewed all described the superintendent's crucial role in the global education initiative and process. The superintendent's leadership was expressed as the single most important factor that contributed to the global education process. The superintendent explained that he was multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic and that he and the interviewees were

proud of the diversity of the school population and considered this diversity as foundational to the implementation of global education. The superintendent was the prime mover in encouraging teaching and learning with a global perspective.

However, the process to implement global education in the urban high school was not found to be systemic but instead existed through informal groups of like-minded educators who took advantage of the superintendent's offerings of professional development and limited resources for implementing global education [6]. There were two initiatives that were explained by the interviewees as exemplifying the global education process. One was the implementation of an international curriculum, the International Baccalaureate (IB), and the other was the expansion of the Chinese language program. These programs were supported by the superintendent and his vision to provide his urban students with access to a global education similar to that of students in suburban schools.

Obstacles in the urban high school included the challenge of pressure and time constraints associated with state-mandated testing, the problem of equity of access for students to engage in international travel experiences due to cost, lack of funding for additional teachers who could engage in cross-disciplinary work, and lack of resources to infuse a global perspective in the curriculum and provide the necessary, ongoing professional development [6].

The superintendent in the urban school expressed his vision for global education and demonstrated leadership that resulted in teachers' investment in global education despite significant challenges. Kilpatrick explains:

The superintendent's stated vision and leadership made teachers feel supported in their interest and efforts to incorporate global education, even in the face of significant challenges. Although the superintendent did not "mandate" global education, his embrace of the concept enabled those who might be hesitant to innovate curricula to actually work a global dimension into teaching and learning. The superintendent's leadership helped to catalyze and move forward the grassroots efforts forming within the high school [6].

However, despite the dedicated efforts of a visionary superintendent, a lack of financial resources impeded the process and it was questionable as to whether or not the efforts to implement global education could be sustained over time.

While both the suburban and the urban schools faced the difficulty of funding and equity of access for all students due to school and family finances, the study's findings suggested that despite the vision of

dedicated leadership, students in lower wealth schools may be less likely to have a sustainable opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills that are necessary for global competence. Few urban, lower socio-economic school districts have highly funded world language departments that include critical languages such as Chinese and Arabic and opportunities for world travel. This has resulted in an increasing "global divide" among advantaged and disadvantaged school districts in the U.S [12]. If policy-makers and educators continue to advocate for a global dimension in education, then a clearer sense of its practical implementation, successes, and challenges are needed in order to make that advocacy a sustainable and equitable reality in schools.

Another finding of Kilpatrick's examination of the high schools was that district and school leaders' continued support of teachers' efforts helped to move the global education process forward [6]. However, school leaders struggle to define and prioritize global education in the midst of competing priorities like achievement expectations on standardized tests and other state and federal mandates, despite the continued advocacy for global education by state and educational leadership groups. Reimers [13] refers to the "obsolete mind-set" of school leaders which often prevents the prioritization of global competencies:

Schools have a greater consensus on how to operationalize traditional competencies, such as literacy, numeracy, and scientific literacy. As a result, these are more likely to be reflected in standards and curriculum frameworks, assessment systems measuring the effectiveness of schools, and professional development initiatives (p.2).

In Massachusetts, as in other states, global education largely remains at the advocacy level, and it is unclear if the efforts are resulting in sustainable implementation in schools.

#### **4. Dedicated Funding is Key for Implementation**

McCarthy [2] found that the theme of dedicated funding for global education was consistent across the three sample districts. In each district, the commitment to global education was evidenced by the allocation of district funds for global education within the operational budget. Each district also relied on grants, including federal and competitive grants, to fund global education.

District educational foundations were additional sources of funding. The necessity of securing funds for global education was an important implementation theme for each superintendent.

Regarding the districts' income status, the statistics reveal similarities among the three districts and schools in the study. Although all three districts qualified for federal Title I funding, (families eligible for free and reduced lunch) not one of the three schools visited was Title I schools. The following table shows the low income statistics in each district compared to the Massachusetts State average.

**Table 1. Low Income and title I data for study districts**

Districts in Study	Low Income (combined Free and Reduced Lunch)	Mass. State	Title I District/School Visited
		Average Low Income (combined Free and Reduced Lunch)	
Appleton-Martin	17.3	34.2	Yes/No
Seaside	8.3	34.2	Yes/No
Woodrow Wilson	12.2	34.2	Yes/No

*Note. Source is Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011[2]*

Of the three schools studied, all were lower than the Massachusetts State Average Low Income percentage of 34.2. The lowest of the three districts, Appleton-Martin, was almost half the state average with the other two considerably below the state average. Although each district qualified as a Title I District, the fact that none of the schools visited qualified as lower wealth schools in each district, suggests a possible relationship between global education and schools that are not of low wealth status. This finding seems to support the challenge of equity of access to global education in low wealth schools as compared with their higher wealth counterparts.

Without the benefit of a robust body of research, the field of global education will continue to lack common agreements and documented scholarly conversations in which ideas, practice, successes, and failures are shared or evaluated with a critical lens. Meanwhile, the process of globalization will continue to burgeon. Eventually K-12 school leaders may find themselves scrambling to catch up and searching for

research to begin or to strengthen their global education initiatives.

### 5. Online learning on a global basis

School leaders need awareness that K-12 web-based learning and global education networks can provide schools with available pathways for their students toward developing education that corresponds with the globalized world. There are no cost Web 2.0 tools such as wikis, blogs, webpages, videos, podcasts or slide presentations that become quickly familiar to students due to students' experience with social media applications like Google Groups, Facebook and Twitter. There are also global networks such as International Education and Resource Network (iEARN) the largest school network where international professional development for educators is included. Students engage in creating collaborative, project-based work with other students across the world [14].

In the United States there is increasing acceptance of online learning in grades K-12 yet many U.S. policymakers and educators do not realize the extent of online learning that is being implemented globally (Powell, 2008). Multi-billion dollar deals and national e-learning initiatives are being developed to bring online learning to K-12 students all over the world [15].

Examples include a 2007 agreement between the United Kingdom and China to create e-learning content for 20 million Chinese students. New Zealand, Hong Kong and Singapore have national Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plans including how to integrate e-learning throughout their K12 educational systems. Other countries- Canada, Australia, Turkey and Mexico have integrated successful virtual schools and online learning for students in their K12 educational systems [15].

### 6. Technology's Vital Role in Global Education

In McCarthy's study [2], technology is a major theme connected to global education. In each district, reference was made to the "flat world" and the work of Thomas Friedman [16] regarding technology, communications and the Internet. Each superintendent talked about technology and the fact that globalization has made technology an indispensable tool of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Superintendent Ann and her district put major emphasis on technology and library media centers.

For Ann, global education is rooted in the interconnectivity of the world and the fact that people can connect all the time in real time. Ann explained,

“Global education is the opportunity to communicate with anyone, in any time, in any place but you can’t communicate in that way without education.” When asked about the term that Ann would choose to characterize global education, her choice was connectivity which involves both making connections and bridging gaps.

Superintendent David and his district put emphasis on technology and libraries. According to David, the role of technology is huge and exciting. He considers the most important use of technology for global education is the use of Skype and communication devices for younger students. David talked about two areas regarding technology. The first is motivation because it is both exciting and motivating for students to connect with a class in Asia. The second area for technology is that of problem solving. In the Seaside District, they are starting to change libraries into problem solving centers because of what libraries can offer in research.

Superintendent Marsha began by saying that “We are not strong in the use of technology as a district.” Marsha said that while there are classroom teachers who do an outstanding job of using technology to support global education, as a system she thinks the district has “quite a way to go.” Librarians are well versed in websites that support students’ research but Marsha could not say with any “confidence” that the district was using technology to address global education

Many superintendents and other educators already realize the importance of technology for learning but for global education, technology is essential. Keeping up to date on the latest technological advances in education is vital. Recognizing students as digital natives who continue to build their technology abilities should move superintendents to research and evaluate best practices in technology for global education. School leaders of all districts regardless of their students’ socio-economic demographics need to ensure that students’ global education includes multiple opportunities for accessing online global resources and participating in global networks and exchanges.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In order to ensure that global learning opportunities are available to all students, the importance of district-level leadership support for global education (both in terms of vision and the provision of resources) is supported by a synthesis of both research studies. The leadership and advocacy of the superintendent (district level leader) is vital in the beginning of the initiative, regardless of whether the superintendent/leader is the actual catalyst for the

focus on global education or if the initiative begins with a group of like-minded educators who seek to implement global education opportunities within a school or district.

District level leaders also play a key role in the sustainability of global education opportunities. As global education becomes institutionalized, faculty and community members become invested and provide support. Once global education is established as an articulated priority, the strong voice of the superintendent may be able to moderate to that of supporter and facilitator of global education.

The importance of establishing policy for global education is highlighted in both studies and suggests that without explicit policy, global education practices can disappear, particularly with the departure of a charismatic and influential superintendent who espouses global education. The establishment of global education as a priority is essential at the district level and even more important at the state and national levels [6].

Both studies [2, 6] demonstrate that the superintendents and their K-12 districts or schools had many essential elements in place to support and sustain global education. Superintendents and districts incorporated global education in the curricula rather than as an add-on or specialty subject.

The schools in the McCarthy study demonstrated key elements for global education implementation. High quality professional development was in place in each district. Funding from the districts’ operating budgets, supplemented by foundation money and grants, was utilized for global education and particularly for professional learning. Each district offered opportunities for global learning through technology, global travel, and exchange programs. An emphasis existed on foreign language learning at the earliest possible age as well as and learning about other countries, cultures, and people, especially through social studies, English language arts, and fine and performing arts. In one district, students were required as part of service-learning to earn the money to pay for international travel and service. These students developed entrepreneurial skills rather than using their own or family funding. Thus, one obstacle for students of low wealth was removed in their pursuit of global learning [2, 6].

If more superintendents can find pathways to incorporate global education in their districts, students will be the first beneficiaries as they develop their own global perspectives and global experiences. Students today are living in extraordinary times. The benefits of global education include opportunities for students to enter the marketplace where their work has global impact, to work cooperatively to solve global problems, and to exercise voice through global

citizenship and peace-building in regard to their own studies, future professions and global contributions.

It is unclear how recent education reforms will impact efforts to implement global education. Educators in the U.S. face increasingly competitive demands, particularly as related to state and federal mandates regarding student achievement and educator evaluation that make challenging the prioritization of knowledge, skills, and experiences intended to increase global competence. Some students will benefit from global education, and others will continue to be denied access to global perspectives and opportunities.

All K-12 school leaders and especially leaders of low wealth districts need to seek creative funding mechanisms and tap community resources to begin or strengthen their global education initiatives for the benefit of their students. The synthesis of these two research studies is offered as a starting place.

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