



Guest Column

International education tied to Indiana's future

By Dr. Suellen Reed, Superintendent of Public Instruction

Gone are the days when our neighbors were our sole competition. Today's Hoosier workforce must compete – not just with other cities and states – but in a diverse and rapidly changing global marketplace. That ability begins with a solid educational foundation.

Indiana has stronger global ties than most Hoosiers realize. For the second consecutive year, our state leads the nation in attracting new jobs through international investment, according to a report from IBM Global Business Services. Moreover, Indiana's population is becoming more diverse with our public schools now ranking third in the nation for the increase in limited English proficient students.

Indiana already loses many of its best and brightest graduates to other states, a brain drain that could increase as the global economy expands. This was never more apparent than when I met a summer intern here at the Indiana Department of Education, a college student from Butler University. She speaks three languages fluently and is learning her fourth while studying international issues in politics and religion. If Indiana doesn't offer job prospects that fit her interests and skill set, she surely will find those opportunities elsewhere.

The bottom line: If we are to maintain and increase our position as a global player, Indiana must provide its citizenry with a greater understanding of other languages and cultures through international education.

These realities underscore the significance of our upcoming observance of International Education Week, held from November 17-21. With that in mind, I strongly urge Indiana's leaders at the state and local levels to work together to:

- Increase access for students to learn a world language starting in elementary school and continuing through high school,
- Integrate technology and international education across subject areas and align with standards consistent with 21st Century skills,
- Provide professional development and international exchange opportunities for Indiana teachers through exchange agreements with partner countries around the world, and
- Boost participation in international student exchange as participants and hosts.

Indiana citizens distinguish themselves on a global scale in all fields of endeavor, from space exploration and medical discoveries to artistic expression. To ensure this record persists well into the future, I urge Hoosiers to get involved. If you can offer our students a cultural experience, contact your local school. If you speak a second language, volunteer to help young children learn these skills. If your company does business outside this country, help students and decision-makers in your community understand the importance of international competence.

How well we meet the challenges of the 21st Century will depend on all of us. Let those in leadership know your shared concerns, do your part to make a difference and together we will secure a prosperous future for our children.