

How Does the United States Compare?

In spite of growing concerns about increasing economic competition from abroad, the United States is not investing in critical areas that will make our young people competitive. The results are telling.

In the latest National Geographic-Roper poll of 18- to 24-year-olds in Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, and the United States, the United States placed second to last, above only Mexico, in geographic knowledge, averaging just 23 questions correct out of 56 total questions (41%).

- **After 9/11, Americans had the lowest percentage of all the countries on a question that asked them to identify the base of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Only 42% of Americans were able to identify the correct country.**
- **Only 19% of young adults in the United States could name four countries that acknowledge having nuclear weapons.**

In contrast to the United States, geography is a required subject in most European countries. In ten countries, including Austria, France, and Norway, students are required to take a stand-alone course in geography every year until high school graduation. In twelve countries, including Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Portugal, geography is required until the age of 15 or 16. In the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Greece, geography is a required subject until age 13 or 14 (HERODOT 2007).

The results of the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress in geography shows that fewer than 30% of students tested in grades 4, 8, and 12 scored at grade-level or above. Disappointing, but it is more worrisome knowing that these scores have mostly stayed the same or gotten worse since the last test in 2001 (NAEP 2011).

Americans' ignorance of our world is the result of a failure to invest in their education. The contrast with the educational practices of the rest of the world is telling. The Teaching Geography is Fundamental Act will provide much-needed funding to improve students' understanding of geography so that the United States remains internationally competitive.

Continues on reverse



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“If we don’t support geography education, we’re going to fall behind in our key U.S.-based geographic technology industries, and then both the U.S. and the rest of the world will get these technologies from somewhere else.”

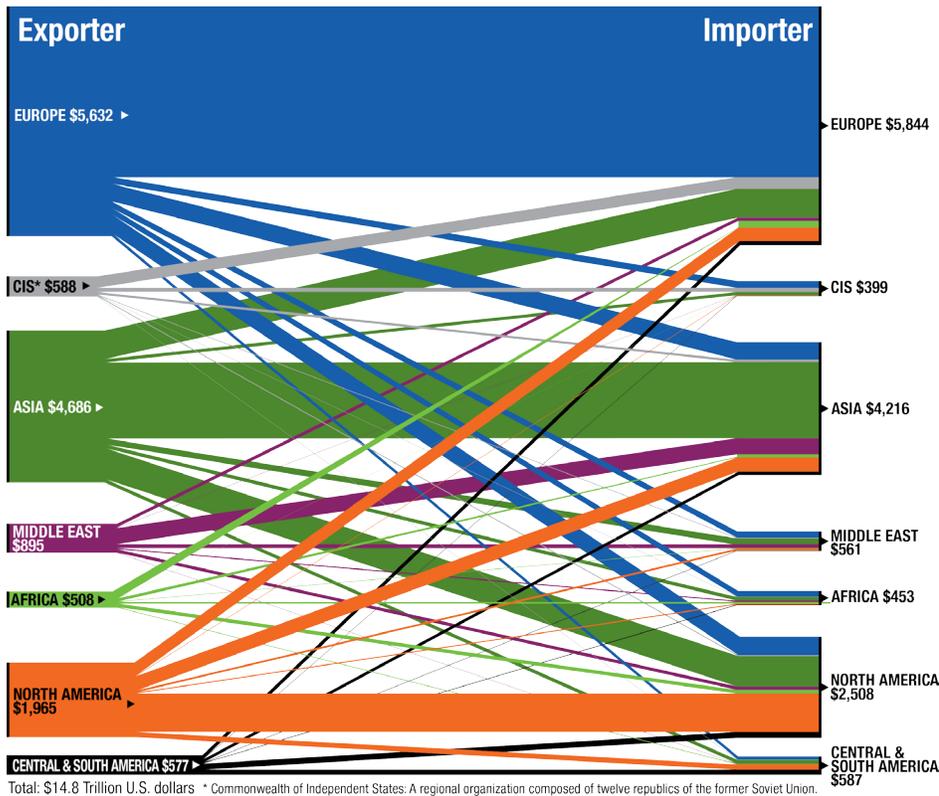
—Douglas Richardson
Executive Director,
Association of American
Geographers

Knowledge and Skills to Succeed in the Global Economy

Geography education helps students to be internationally competitive in the global economy by providing them with an understanding of the complex relationships among world trade, resource location, migration flows, and technology innovation. Using world trade as an example, globalization has increased the amount of trade inter-regionally, yet it is clear that most trade still occurs within regions. Students who lack this understanding of the global economy will face challenges in decisions necessary to create new enterprises and expand the international reach of existing businesses.

In the time since the class of 2012 was born, international free trade agreements have led to an increase of North American exports to other world regions, yet trade within North America still accounts for half of all merchandise exports for the United States, Canada, and Mexico due to NAFTA (implemented in 1994).

World Merchandise Trade, 2010
Billion U.S. dollars



In our global economy, the understanding and analytical skills developed through geography education are essential to make well-reasoned decisions about *where* and *how* to conduct business in particular locations. Critical business choices such as where to build facilities, how to design a supply chain, and how to market to different cultures all require geographic reasoning.

Sources: HERODOT State of Geography Report, herodot.net; Geography 2010 Report Card, nationsreportcard.gov/geography_2010/; International Trade Statistics, wto.org