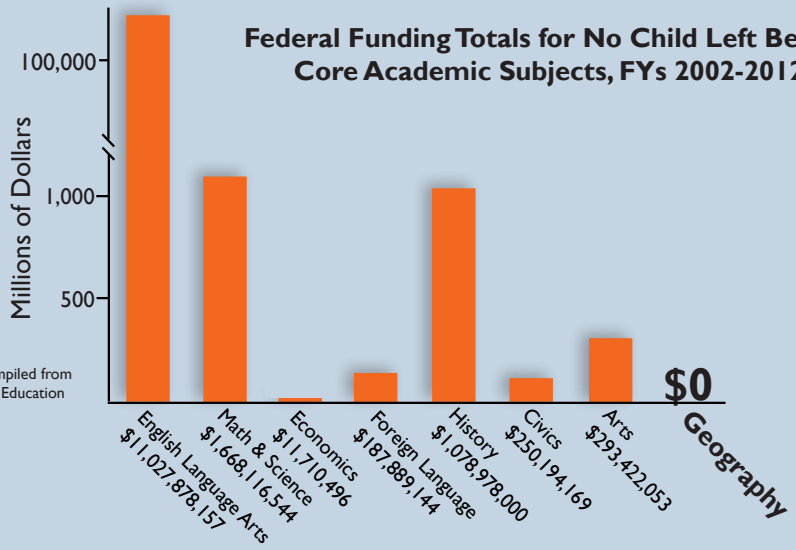
Geography Education in the United States

Preparing Students for Today's World

Geography education helps build geo-literacy. Geo-literacy is an essential set of skills for 21st century citizens that enables people to make critical decisions; decisions about locations and transportation—Where to conduct an activity? How to move goods or people from one location to another?—and decisions with far-reaching consequences—decisions that have impact far beyond the time and place where the decision is being made. In order to have a geo-literate citizenry, we must support geography education in our nation's schools.

Of nine areas listed as core academic subjects in federal education legislation, geography is the only one that has never had a dedicated federal program for research or innovation. In order to have a geo-literate citizenry, we must support geography in our nation's schools.



Source: Data compiled from the U.S. Dept. of Education

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Education Foundation

"As the world grows smaller and more interdependent daily, our country's future absolutely depends on our ability to see the connections between ourselves and our global neighbors."

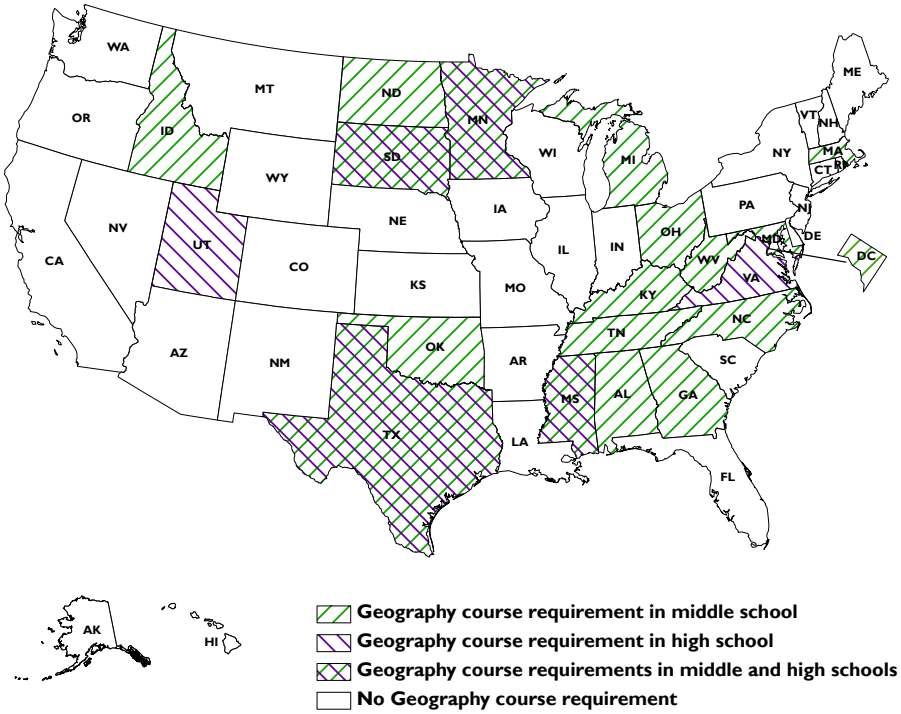
—Gilbert M. Grosvenor
National Geographic Society

The Status of Geography Education in the U.S.

The Need to Improve the Quality and Quantity of Geography Education

Currently, less than half of high school graduates in the United States take a stand-alone geography course in either middle school or high school. The 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress for Geography shows the cost: 70% of 4th, 8th, or 12th graders scored below grade level. 30% of 12th graders scored below "basic", the lowest rating on the scale.

State-Level Geography Course Requirements in Middle School and High School[1]



[1] A geography course requirement is defined as at least one semester- or year-long stand-alone course during middle school or high school.
Sources: U.S. Department of Education, www2.ed.gov; Geography 2010 Report Card, nationsreportcard.gov/geography_2010/

"Broad knowledge of geography is an essential part of a full education. This is particularly true at a time when the lives of nearly all our citizens are deeply affected by what happens throughout the world. The impact comes not only from political and diplomatic events, but also—and at times more powerfully—from the crosscurrents of an increasingly global economy."

National Assessment Governing Board