Subcommittee: Student Life- Curriculum Innovations: Student
Exchange Programs

Subcommittee Member Name:

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Introduction

Merriam-Webster defines innovation as "the introduction of something new; a new idea, method, or device." Synonyms for innovation include modernization, departure, leading edge, alteration, modification, shift, variation, and cutting edge. Curriculum innovation may include encouraging collaborative learning, recognizing the value of diversity within the population, creating more opportunities for globalization, developing interesting courses of study, and incorporating enhancements to current programs.

As part of our mission to prepare all students for the future, opportunities for enrichment beyond the grade-level curriculum helps students meet their full potential. To address the needs of students at various levels, the enrichment opportunities sub-committee considered the creation and implementation of a student foreign exchange program There are very few New Jersey districts that currently participate in student exchange programs. They are outlined in the chart below.

District	Program
Scotch Plains-Fanwood	Spain, France, Italy
Morris School District	The Council on International Educational

	Exchange (CIEE)

Purpose

The overall purpose of strategically planning to increase enrichment opportunities is to maximize student learning throughout a child's educational career. The purpose of this report is to summarize the findings of the review of research related to curriculum innovations conducted by the Student Life subcommittee of the larger Strategic Planning committee and to offer recommendations to the Board of Education in preparation for the development and implementation of the next Hillsborough Township School District Strategic Plan.

Review of Literature / Research Supporting the Need to Implement the Areas of Focus

While empirical evidence about the education outcomes of travel is limited, outdated, and scattered across many fields of study, research surrounding the educational benefits of student travel, the worthiness of student exchange programs, and post high school pursuit of foreign languages exists, although the focus of the research is limited to university programs and programming. In fact, very limited research exists surrounding foreign exchange programs at the high school level. However, the subcommittee was able to provide a summary of the limited research as well as the benefits and challenges surrounding student exchange programs.

The State of New Jersey Department of Education conducted its first International Education Summit in Fall 2004 with the goal of providing information for the purpose of developing a five-year plan that would improve the capacity of its "schools to provide quality international education programs." According to the NJDOE website, "the summit was the first

of many activities designed to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of international knowledge to social and cultural integration in New Jersey and to new Jersey's economy;

- Mobilize political, corporate and educational leadership to support a greater focus on education about other world regions, their languages and cultures; and

- Build networks among educators and schools interested in infusing international knowledge and skills across the curriculum and strengthening existing international education programs"

Additionally, a vision, mission, and goals were outlined. The second of three identified goals reads, "To connect student acquisition of international literacies to *real world* experiences both in New Jersey and beyond state and national borders" (p. 6).

The New Jersey International Education Summit Report was presented to the State Board of Education in the Fall of 2005. The report provided background about the demographics and business in New Jersey as well as an overview of the summit with recommendations for moving forward. Page three of the report posits, "Given today's economic and political realities, it has become increasingly important that states -- and schools -- increase their capacity to understand and respond to an ever changing world that has become more dependent on the international economy. Issues such as immigration and foreign policy increasingly influence the course of public education in a richly diverse state such as New Jersey" (p. 3).

While it has been twelve years since the New Jersey International Education Summit Report was published, the aforementioned statement remains unequivocally accurate. World societies are increasingly interconnected, and political differences can no longer prevent the

continuous development of the "global economy." In today's political climate where there seems to be a marked diminishment in tolerance and a marked increase in xenophobia, few would disagree that our differences are more apparent. As many of humanity's issues are global issues, a global perspective is essential in order to properly and collaboratively address problems such as poverty, pollutions, disease, education, etc. The introduction of global perspectives challenges familiar understandings and commonly held assumptions. Providing our community with an opportunity to warmly welcome students from around the globe and allowing them to take part in the American / Hillsborough way of life and conversely providing the opportunity for our students to be warmly welcomed via immersion in other cultures is the true definition of globalizing the curriculum. We are literally and figuratively opening up the world to our students.

In a 1984 study titled, *Life after Study Abroad: A Survey of Undergraduate Academic and Career Choices*, author Gregory K. Armstrong reports the findings of a survey he mailed to 180 undergraduate students who experienced a study abroad opportunity while enrolled in high school. In attempting to assess how the participants perceived their high school study abroad experiences after graduating and entering college, he had a particular interest in finding out whether the experiences motivated them to continue studying languages, if it affected their study/career choices, and if they believed there were any residual benefits. In terms of perseverance in language study, Armstrong (1984) reported that 87% of those that responded believed the study abroad experience influenced their attitudes towards foreign language study although there was also general agreement that most of them held favorable views of such prior to the experience as well. Additionally, the participants reported that the experience they had in

high school seemed to produce a greater desire to "seek other cross-cultural associations through future travel and study" (Armstrong, 1984, p. 2) Furthermore, approximately 70% of those who responded indicated a language as a major or minor area of study in college, and over 55% believed that their overseas experience influenced their choice of study in preparation for a future career. Finally, student perception related to lasting benefits as a result of their participation in the program included, but were not limited to, the following: increased language fluency; increased interest in living, studying, or traveling abroad; increased exposure to and appreciation for cultural diversity; and acquisition of self-confidence and independence (Armstrong, 1984). Armstrong further concludes that "a successful foreign study experience during high school years continues to play an important role in participants' attitudes and decisions regarding careers, additional language study, and increased cross-cultural activities" (1984, p. 4).

Recommendation with Rationale

The following table outlines the benefits and challenges associated with beginning a foreign exchange program.

Advantages	Challenges
Training for school officials	Significant cost
Increased language acquisition via immersion	Application Process- 9 - 12 month minimum
Increase in maturity, coping, and problem solving skills	Minimum of five students / year for five years
Increased understanding and acceptance of different cultural and community perspectives	"Responsible Officer" designation

Broader general knowledge and enhanced interest in global issues	Significant responsibilities
Personal development and awareness leading to increased self-confidence and self esteem	
Awareness of alternative multifaceted approaches to learning	
Increased comfort level in "foreign" environments	
Prospective employers deem foreign exchange programs favorable	

Conclusion

Study abroad experiences, as well as student exchange programs, are specifically designed for learning to occur. However, the research is limited, often outdated, and scattered across varied fields of study. Much research focuses on college students and adults. Furthermore, much of the research speaks to all types of travel experience, including, but not limited to, serendipitous, family, and independent travel. The research also stresses that no matter what the travel experience, it most often resulted in greater general knowledge, higher academic achievement, personal growth, and societal/cultural awareness.

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