



**CED URGES INCREASED INVESTMENT IN
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND
FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES**

**Business-led group warns of economic and national security
implications of U.S. language gap**

WASHINGTON, D.C., February 9, 2006 – The United States will become less competitive in the global economy because of a shortage of strong foreign language and international studies programs at the elementary, high school and college levels, warns a new statement from the Committee for Economic Development (CED), a business-led policy group.

The CED statement, *Education for Global Leadership: The Importance of International Studies and Foreign Language Education for U. S. Economic and National Security*, asserts that the lack of Americans educated in foreign languages and cultures is hampering efforts to counter terrorist threats. Said the CED statement, “In order to confront the twenty-first century challenges to our economy and national security, our educational system must be strengthened to enhance the foreign language skills and cultural awareness of our students. America’s continued global leadership will depend on our students’ abilities to interact with the world community both inside and outside our borders.” The statement is the work of CED’s Subcommittee on International Studies and Foreign Language Education, co-chaired by CED Trustees John Brademas, Charles Kolb and Alfred Mockett.

“The tragedies of 9/11, Madrid, London, Bali and Baghdad must bring home to us as Americans the imperative of learning more about the world of Islam, as a matter of our national security on a dangerous planet”, said Dr. John Brademas, former U.S. Congressman from Indiana and President Emeritus of New York University. “But it is not only”, said Brademas, “for reasons of national security that we must learn more about countries and cultures other than our own. Such knowledge is also indispensable to America’s economic strength and competitive position in the world. The marketplace has now become global.”

Brademas added, “The key here is fluency in one language other than English.” Only about one-third of seven to twelfth grade students study a foreign language, and approximately 9% of students enroll in a foreign language in college. Introductory language courses continue to dominate enrollments. Spanish is the most commonly studied foreign language, accounting for nearly 70% of enrollments in secondary schools and just over one-half of enrollments in colleges and universities. Few students are studying the less-commonly taught “critical languages” crucial to national security, such as Arabic, Chinese, Persian/Farsi, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Russian and Turkish. Moreover, only one percent of U.S. undergraduate students study abroad. While an increasing number of students are studying Arabic, it still accounts for just 0.8% of foreign language enrollments in postsecondary institutions.

“America may be the world’s only military superpower, but in business we cannot always insist on our way of doing things if we want to do business with the rest of the world,” said Alfred T. Mockett, CED Trustee, Chairman and CEO, Corinthian Capital LLC.

Although globalization is pushing Americans to expand the knowledge of our students, the education reform movement has led many schools to narrow their curricula. Reforms, like those outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act, hold states accountable for student achievement in reading, science and mathematics, crowding out time for teaching foreign languages, geography and the other social sciences.

High school graduation requirements in many states consist of only minimal course work in international courses—world history, geography, politics and area studies—while some states require no course work in these subjects at all.

“In January, President Bush announced a foreign language initiative, and I commend him for addressing these issues and for involving the Secretaries of Defense, Education and State, and the Director of national Intelligence, John Negroponte. Our success in improving and expanding international studies will have extremely important implications for America’s defense, diplomatic, intelligence and education efforts as well as for our economic security,” said Charles E.M. Kolb, CED’s President and also co-chair of the CED Subcommittee on International Studies.

CED’s recommendations include:

- **Teaching international content across the curriculum and at all levels of learning to expand American students’ knowledge of other countries and cultures.**

International knowledge should be integrated into each state’s K-12 curriculum standards and assessments. Congress should enact an Education for Global Leadership Act to provide funds to globalize the curricula of elementary and secondary schools. Teachers should receive professional development training to prepare them to teach international studies. The business community can play an important role by supporting programs to promote international knowledge throughout the education system.

- **Expanding the training pipeline at every level of education to address the paucity of Americans fluent in foreign languages, especially critical, less-commonly taught languages.**

For national security reasons, the Federal government should increase funding for programs to increase foreign language courses in the elementary grades as well as developing a pipeline for critical language learning. Governors should provide incentives for alternative teacher certification routes to encourage native speakers of critical languages to become foreign language teachers. Knowledge of Middle East languages and culture, in particular, is vital to a more secure future for America and the world.

- **National leaders—political leaders as well as the business and philanthropic communities and the media—should educate the public about the importance of improving education in languages other than English and in international studies.**

The President should host a White House Conference on Education for Global Leadership, bringing together business, education and national-security leaders to assess how U.S. foreign language and international studies programs can be strengthened to ensure that America maintains its economic and national security. Governors and local business leaders should take advantage of opportunities to educate workers and citizens about the link between international commerce and jobs in their states. Business leaders, the states, private philanthropic foundations and the media should all play a role in encouraging such education.

To compete successfully in the global marketplace, both U.S.-based multinational corporations as well as small businesses increasingly need employees with knowledge of foreign languages and cultures to market products to customers around the globe and to work effectively with foreign employees and partners in other countries. For example, foreign language skills and knowledge of other cultures can prove invaluable when working on global business teams or negotiating with overseas clients.

Education for Global Leadership: The Importance of International Studies and Foreign Language Education for U. S. Economic and National Security and an executive summary of the recommendations can be found at www.ced.org

CED is a non-profit, non-partisan organization of more than 200 business leaders and university presidents. Since 1942, its research and policy programs have addressed many of the nation’s most pressing economic and social issues, including education reform, workforce competitiveness, campaign finance, health care, and global trade and finance. CED promotes policies to produce increased productivity and living standards, greater and more equal opportunity for every citizen, and an improved quality of life for all.