

THE COMPLEX ISSUES
FACING YOUR COMMUNITY
AND BUSINESS REQUIRE
GEOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE

Dear Business or Civic Leader:

The Canadian Council for Geographic Education (CCGE) is dedicated to promoting the highest standards of geographic education in our nation's schools. We undertake this mission because we believe that geographic ignorance is damaging to the country's long-term well being. This pamphlet explains why we invite you to join our effort to improve geographic education.

Global processes tie our nation to international networks of supply and demand. A car manufactured in Canada by an international corporation contains many imported components and software designed and manufactured in Canada is sold world-wide. For this reason and others, an industrial executive recently noted:

"Geographic literacy is now a requisite for the work force in the same sense as reading and mathematics."

On the local level, planning decisions affect all businesses as well as individual citizens. Geographic knowledge is essential for informed decision-making on these crucial issues.

The Canadian Council for Geographic Education (CCGE) is indebted to our colleagues at the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) in the U.S. who developed the original version of this pamphlet. The NCGE graciously gave its permission for the adaptation of this information for Canada.

The Canadian Council for Geographic Education welcomes your involvement in stimulating better geographic teaching and learning. Currently we have nearly 3,500 elementary and secondary school educators in our national network. You are invited to contact our office for additional help to improve geographic education in your community.

Sincerely,

Dickson Mansfield
Chair
Canadian Council for Geographic Education

Geographic ignorance is harmful to our country's future

Students in Canada know less about geography than students in many other developed nations

Surveys show that the geographic knowledge of Canadian students leaves much room for improvement. This is especially so when compared with nations such as Japan, the United Kingdom, Australia and Germany. In many cases geographical knowledge has declined over the years to the point that many of our children cannot read maps or locate provinces, territories, cities or important physical features – even in our own country! This lack of geographical knowledge is more than an embarrassment; it is a threat to Canada's status in the world community.

Lack of geographic knowledge affects the future of your business, your community and your country

How can residents of your community participate in decisions on land-use planning, flood control, industrial development policy and a multitude of other issues if they lack the background to understand the various options available?

How can voters develop opinions on such matters as forest management, managing development in cities or spending billions of dollars to clean up toxic waste dumps if they lack the basic geographical knowledge needed to understand these issues?

How can citizens evaluate Canadian foreign policy options if they know nothing about the countries involved?

How can people assess the merits of international treaties such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) if they are ignorant of the participating countries and issues?

What is geography?

Geographers study space and place. They are interested in recognizing and explaining how natural processes and human activities shape our world. Geography is often identified with memorizing facts about rivers, capitals, products and other seemingly trivial things. Geographers, however, are more concerned about understanding why things are located where they are and how they are related to the location of other features – knowledge which allows us to see how historical processes and present activities influence places. If our understanding is deep enough we can anticipate future developments and plan for them.

Geography for Life: National Geography Standards

Over the past five years, our colleagues in the United States have led the development of a “world class” document of geography standards for grades 1 to 12. These standards were developed with input from outstanding educators and geographers from around the world. The resulting document, *Geography for Life*, was released in late 1994. Copies of this document have been made available to Ministries and Departments of Education across Canada as well as to all Faculties of Education. Copies may be purchased through the CCGE office or through the National Council for Geographic Education in the U.S.

These geography standards are benchmarks against which the content of geography courses at all grade levels can be measured. The standards have the potential to affect the education of all children in Canada. We strongly encourage you to consider adapting these standards as part of your school, board or provincial/territorial education program.

Effective geographic education can improve your community

Geographic education involves gathering and analyzing data

Well-designed geographic education programs involve more than just “book learning.” Maps are important sources of information but students should also learn to collect data, from print and electronic sources and field observation in the community, to make their own maps, graphs and tables and to present their findings in papers and reports. Well-equipped geography classrooms, even in the primary grades, should have computers with mapping and geographic information systems programs that allow students to plot and analyze data. The combination of skills and knowledge gained in well-equipped and well-taught geography classes is of great utility in thousands of work situations.

Geography teaches critical thinking

By learning to collect, analyze and present findings based on their own research, geography students hone critical thinking skills which help them to become good problem solvers. These skills help make geography students better informed and more useful employees and citizens.

Geography deals with environmental issues

It would be hard to imagine an industry or business that is not involved in some way with environmental issues. Geography students learn about their environment, initially by becoming familiar with the local community and later by learning about linkages and

interactions among global ecosystems. Geography students learn about the physical and human elements of the world in which they live and are sensitive to how these elements interact.

Geography education is global education

Businesses around the world are becoming increasingly global and international corporate investment by Canadian firms is increasing annually. Geography students learn not only about Canada but about all regions of the world. This global knowledge also makes geography students sensitive to physical and cultural factors that businesses with international operations need to consider.

Geography students can evaluate important issues

Business is directly affected by planning decisions. A good background in modern geography can prepare students to understand and contribute to debate on local and regional planning, resource utilization, environmental conservation and land use.

Geography training is career training

Skills gained by geography students prepare them for many kinds of careers such as: teaching, urban and regional planning, land-use planning, natural resource analysis/management, environmental evaluation, retail and wholesale location analysis, cartography, remote sensing, geographic information systems technology/analysis, tourism and travel planning, real estate sales and appraisal and consulting.

You can help to ensure quality geographic education in community schools

Here are some ways that you, or organizations to which you belong, might support geographic education in your community. These suggestions only scratch the surface; you and your associates may be able to think of more suitable alternatives for your community. Before engaging in any of these activities, check with local school officials about their curricula, policies and any special needs or priorities they may have.

Personal involvement — informally discuss your interest in geographic education with school leaders at meetings of civic organizations or elsewhere. Ask school officials about the status of geographic education programs in local schools and the qualifications of geography teachers. Volunteer to speak at local schools, drawing from your career/business experience.

Civic group projects — take on improvement of geographic education as a community activity.

Equipment donations — contribute out-of-date computers, especially if they are equipped to run and print graphics programs (such contributions often qualify for a tax deduction). Other types of equipment may also be useful; contact local school officials to find out their needs. Magazines and other publications of geographic interest such as *Canadian Geographic* or *National Geographic* may be welcome, along with maps, posters and similar items.

Financial support — give funds to support college and university scholarships, summer institutes for teacher training, study abroad, prizes for winners of geography competitions or field work and other out-of-class student activities.

Mentorships, apprenticeships or similar career training or orientation programs — arrange for students to work with mapping or surveying companies, environmental or planning consultants, government planning agencies or other appropriate organizations.

Volunteering — help to organize and conduct educational competitions such as The Great Canadian Geography Challenge or the school community-based Family Geography Challenge.

Public relations — promote geographic education programs and publicize student and faculty achievements.

Citizens advisory positions — run for the local school board, serve on committees to improve geography instruction or encourage the adaptation of the “world class” *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards* in local schools.

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