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Teacher's mission: Increase geography education

NATALIE WOJINSKI, a SOCIAL sciences teacher at Hercules High School, recently returned from a weeklong training in Washington D.C. to learn strategies for increasing public awareness of the need for geography education. Ms. Wojinski, who is also the department chair at her school, is the Northern California coordinator for My Wonderful World, a National Geographic public engagement campaign to increase opportunities for geographic education for kids and teens.



My Wonderful World was created in response to a National Geographic/Roper poll conducted in January 2006 that indicated students don't know much about geography. Results from 510 teens and young adults between the ages of 18 to 24 who responded the survey showed that:

- one-third could not locate Louisiana on a map
- almost half (48 percent) could not find Mississippi
- 60 percent could not find Iraq on a map off the Middle East
- 47 percent could not find India on a map of Asia
- 74 percent think English is the primary language spoken by the most people in the world (it's Mandarin Chinese).

Hercules High School teacher and department chair Natalie Wojinski says kids need to know more about geography.

“Most everyone agrees that geography instruction is important,” said Ms. Wojinski. “The challenge is to get geography to be taught as a discreet subject in high school, and to integrate it into instruction at all levels.”

The centerpiece of My Wonderful World is www.mywonderfulworld.org, a website that features special sections for parents, teachers and students, and a checklist for schools to see if they're prepared to teach geography. Sponsors include the Smithsonian Institution, The National PTA, the United Nations Foundation, 4-H, the Council on Competitiveness, the International Reading Association, and the National Council for Social Studies.

“My job is to get the word out in California, particularly the Bay Area, about the need for studying geography, and the need for students to learn about geography if we want them to be competitive in the world,” Ms. Wojinski said. During their training week the educators went to Capitol Hill, and the California contingent met with the staffs of George Miller; Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein to discuss support for geography education.

The main support vehicle is the Teaching Geography is Fundamental Act, created in the spring of 2007. The No Child Left Behind Act names nine core subjects to be taught, but geography is the only one not funded. The proposed legislation would put \$15 million a year for five years for teacher training into NCLB to bring geography into the classroom as an integrated subject. The proposed law has 40 co-sponsors in the house and 18 in the senate, according to Ms. Wojinski.

Being the Northern California public engagement coordinator for My Wonderful World has its benefits for students. National Geographic is launching a “Celebrate Asia” activity which will include a national touring of a huge carpet map of Asia. Weighing in at more than 100 pounds, the map covers the size of an elementary school multi-purpose room. Ms. Wojinski reserved the map and as part of the tour it will arrive at Hercules High School the week of May 19, 2008. She plans to coordinate the map exhibit with the local elementary schools so that their students will have the chance to learn some geography in a new way.

School construction update: El Cerrito High School



Exterior wall and parapet construction of Building B makes progress.

Construction update: El Cerrito High School (cont.)



(Left) Retaining wall behind Building A takes shape. (Right) Exterior wall to the locker room and studio areas of Building E scaffolded for action.



Wall construction in practice gym rises to the top.

New on the district website

The following information is now available on the district website:

- July 25 and August 1 Board of Education meeting minutes — www.wccusd.k12.ca.us/board/minutes/index.shtml
- Criteria for Portola Middle School relocation — \ www.wccusd.k12.ca.us/construction/Facilities/Portola/Criteria_Adoption_for_MS_Final_8-15-07.pdf

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