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Kids don't know their geography

By Dennis Kelly
USA TODAY

U.S. high school seniors have little trouble identifying the nations that make the nightly news, but have otherwise "feeble geography skills," says a report out Wednesday.

The first National Assessment of Educational Progress on geography calls the deficiencies a "serious" concern.

"Unless we place a new emphasis on geography, we'll pass on to children the stewardship of a world they literally do not know," says Secretary of Education Lauro F. Cava-

zos. The test of 3,000 students found:

- 87 percent identified Canada on a world map; 85 percent found the Soviet Union.

But only 37 percent located Southeast Asia. And 16 percent mistakenly thought the Panama Canal saves sailing time between New York and London.

- Students have some map-reading skills, but only 58 percent knew the difference between longitude and latitude.

- 79 percent understood the basic way to control acid rain was to reduce pollution. But only 41 percent recognized that nuclear

winter – a global dust cloud caused by widespread nuclear explosions, which then screens out sunlight – would affect the environment.

The findings "shouldn't surprise anyone because geography is simply not being taught in many school districts," says Gilbert Grosvenor of the National Geographic Society.

Says Ina V.S. Mullis of the Educational Testing Service: "In addition to asking parents if they know where their children are, we might begin asking children if they *themselves* know where they are."

EM9020b: Test of geographical savvy

By Dennis Kelly
USA TODAY

Want to see how well you would do on the geography test that was given to 3,000 U.S. high school seniors?

Here are some sample questions that appeared on the test given to students for the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the federally mandated check on student knowledge.

The test measured not only students' ability to locate countries and cities on a map, but also their understanding of cultural and physical geography.

- Which of the following is the north-to-south sequence of major cities on the West Coast of the United States?
 - Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland.
 - Portland, Los Angeles, Seattle, San Francisco.
 - San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles.
 - Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles.
- Large parts of the American Midwest were covered almost entirely by forests 150 years ago. Today the forest areas are much smaller. Which of the following is most responsible for this change?
 - A decrease in average temperature.
 - An increase in average precipitation.
 - An increase in the number of forest fires.
 - The growth of farming.
- As one goes from the centre of an inland metropolitan area to the countryside, what happens to the temperature?
 - It increases.
 - It decreases.
 - It changes unpredictably.
 - It remains the same.
- The spread of an idea from one part of the world to another is called:
 - External migration.
 - Integration.
 - Industrialization.
 - Cultural diffusion.
- The Hawaiian Islands first came into being as a result of:
 - The separation of land fragments from Asia.
 - The formation of coral reefs.
 - Volcanic eruptions.
 - Undersea erosion.
- Which of the following, combined with the Earth's revolution around the sun, causes the seasons?
 - The frequency of sunspot occurrences.
 - The gravitational pull of the moon.
 - The intensity of light emitted by the sun.
 - The tilt of the Earth's axis.
- The construction of the Panama Canal shortened the sailing time between New York and:
 - London.
 - Port-au-Prince.
 - Rio de Janeiro.
 - San Francisco.

EM9020c: Educators give schools a B-minus

By Dennis Kelly
USA TODAY

U.S. school administrators give public schools an average of B-minus, says a new survey.

In the survey of 385 school administrators by Allstate Insurance Co. and the American Association of School Administrators, 68 percent gave the public education system a grade of "B"; 2.3 percent "C"; 7 percent "A" and

2 percent "D."

Other findings:

- 73 percent said public education is better now than a decade ago; 9 percent, about the same; 8 percent, worse now.

- 51 percent rated U.S. public schools as better than England's; 70 percent, better than the Soviet Union's; 36 percent better than Japan's.

- Among problems cited: lack of parent involvement (81 percent), poor student motivation (75 percent), cuts in state or local budgets (67 percent) and undermotivated teachers (62 percent).

"There will probably never be a time when we can say our schools are perfect, because they have to serve the diverse needs of a democracy such as ours," says Gary Marx, of the administrators group.

The three articles EM9020 reprinted above are used in Figure 2.11 in the STAT 220 Course Materials and in Statistical Highlight #36.