

# Promoting Global 21<sup>st</sup>- Century Education: A Review of the International Studies Schools Network (ISSN)

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One of the most fundamental obligations of any society is to prepare its children to lead productive and prosperous lives as adults. In this regard, there is strong evidence to suggest that successful school experiences leading to attainment of a postsecondary credential are correlated with increases in employment opportunities, lifetime earnings, and even improved physical health (Rothwell, 2012). Notably, however, over the past several decades, rapid advances in science, communications, and technology have shifted the economy in the United States from industry-oriented to information-based (Rios, Ling, Pugh, Becker, & Bacall, 2020). Societal and globalized workforce needs, in turn, call for today's youth to develop increasingly broad, contemporary skills, frequently called *21<sup>st</sup>-century skills* (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

In recent years, the Center for Research and Reform in Education (CRRE) at Johns Hopkins University has been evaluating pre-K to 12 educational initiatives focused on preparing students to succeed in postsecondary education, careers, and citizenship through exposure to specialized curricula, experiential and project-based learning, and school-to-community connections (Morrison, Risman et al., 2019; Morrison, Ross et al., 2018). As part of this research, we identify national and international projects pursuing similar goals. For this paper, we have selected for review the International Studies Schools Network (ISSN), an initiative of the Center for Global Education of the Asia Society (<https://asiasociety.org>). Focuses below include its history, vision and goals, and research support examining impacts on students.

### *What is the ISSN?*

Founded in 1956, the Asia Society is a non-profit organization whose educational mission is to promote international understanding and relationships among people in a global context. In 2003, it launched the International Studies Schools Network (ISSN). One major goal of the ISSN is to reduce the achievement gap for historically underserved students. Another is to prepare these students for careers and citizenship through acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required in a global world. ISSN addresses these goals by establishing collaborative partnerships with districts and schools to cultivate school improvement and capacity building in global education and 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning.

Through the collaborative partnerships, the ISSN provides customized support to districts and schools striving to prepare their teachers and students for the challenges of a complex global future. The ISSN has developed a systematic approach to whole-school transformation of teaching and learning that engages the school leadership and entire faculty in a structured sequence of professional development and networked

learning. Based on a model developed at Stanford University, the ISSN developed the Graduation Performance System (GPS), which offers supports and services such as:

- Effective school improvement strategies
- Teacher professional development in project-based learning and authentic assessment
- Instructional strategies to promote student-centered learning
- An assets-based approach to diversity and equity
- An operational framework for developing 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and social-emotional learning

### *Who Participates and in What Ways?*

Currently, the ISSN includes 78 schools in 16 states, including Washington, D.C., and a school in Brazil. Approximately, 83% are public schools, 15% are charters, and 2% are independent. The schools engage with ISSN in various ways tailored to their interests and needs. For example, those desiring initially to provide teachers with the same foundation of basic knowledge about global competence education can access a series of one-hour learner-paced online modules, such as “Introduction to Global Competence” or “Teaching Competencies in a Global Context.” Other options and resources include:

- Coaching and workshops for school leaders and teachers, examples of which are “Leadership in the Global School” and “Student Portfolios and Exhibitions,” respectively.
- The “Global Ed Explorer,” which provides teachers with resources, tools, and sample lesson materials relevant to effective instruction in global education.
- Networked learning events that connect teachers and school leaders with colleagues from other schools to share experiences and resources.
- Leaders’ seminars, in which school and district learners meet regularly to build leadership capacity and sustain programs.
- Program Reviews that engage educators and administrators in a whole-school process of receiving and interpreting feedback on their global school design model.

### *Evidence Support*

Fundamental to the ISSN’s continuous improvement and future scale-up plans is ongoing formative and summative evaluation to guide decision making and document efficacy (E. Chasin<sup>1</sup>, personal communication, April 19, 2021). Accordingly, the ISSN will be commissioning studies for the 2021-22 school year and beyond to evaluate planned

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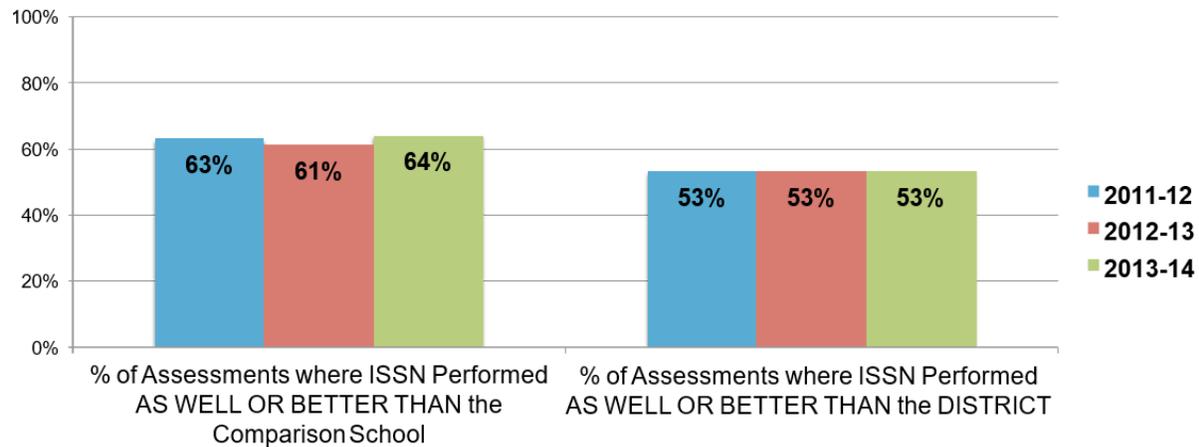
<sup>1</sup> Eugene Chasin is the CEO of the non-profit Community Catalyst Partners, which is the present parent organization for the ISSN.

refinements and extensions of strategies and resources. Existing evidence support is provided from two evaluation studies (Blazevski, 2014, 2015), as reviewed below.

The first study included descriptive and correlation analyses of grades 9-12 students' GPS module usage, academic achievement, and motivation in two ISSN schools. Findings from Year 1 revealed that total GPS module dosage was significantly positively correlated with reading, math, science, and social studies state test scores, as well as with standardized achievement scores for all subjects combined. In Year 2, students demonstrated statistically significant gains on measures of STEM self-efficacy, engagement in school, and global competence. Again, module dosage was a significant predictor of achievement, although results were much more pronounced in the school serving greater percentages of minority and lower-income students. These results provide suggestive evidence of positive influences of the modules on a variety of academic and personal growth measures. While the results regarding usage and outcomes are correlational rather than causal, it is promising that greater usage was positively associated with stronger impacts, especially for minority and low-income students.

The second study (Blazevski, 2015) examined program efficacy by employing a treatment-control-group comparison design. Specifically, each of 22 ISSN schools was matched to a similar comparison school based on geographic proximity and student demographics. On average, students in ISSN schools were 68% low-income, 75% minority, and 20% English Language Learners. Results showed that students in ISSN schools performed as well as or better than comparison schools on 98 of 154 (64%) state-level achievement measures examined (see Figure 1). On district-level assessments, the ISSN schools equaled or surpassed the comparison schools on 53% of the measures. These advantages remained stable over three years and, as expected, were more pronounced for middle and high school students than for elementary students (i.e., elementary ISSN programming was fairly new).

Figure 1

*ISSN vs Comparison School and District Performance across State Assessments*

To corroborate and strengthen research support, particularly in view of ongoing program refinements, further studies are planned to examine motivational and academic impacts of ISSN students longitudinally in a larger sample of schools.

*Summary*

The ISSN strives to reduce the achievement gap for historically underserved students and prepare them for careers and citizenship in a globalized society. Its approach, called the Graduation Performance System (GPS), establishes partnerships and networks with schools and school districts, supported by the provision of courses, workshops, curricula, coaching, and other resources to promote 21<sup>st</sup>-century education environments for students, teachers, and school leaders. Currently, the ISSN includes 78 schools in 16 states, including Washington, D.C., and a school in Brazil. Research findings show statistically significant advantages in academic achievement for students in ISSN schools compared to those in similar schools, especially in schools serving higher percentages of minority and low-income students. Notably, the Asia Society is currently engaged in conducting and planning rigorous third-party evaluation research to optimize school support, program implementation quality, and student outcomes.

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