In a Tuesday in late March, nearly 700 eighth and ninth grade students at Springhouse Middle School in Allentown, Pa., passed through the customs foyer on their way to their homerooms, where they received their Springhouse passports. Their passage through “customs” commenced a day intended to encourage students to understand and celebrate the cultural diversity that populates the middle school they attend and the world in which they live. Multicultural Day is the culminating event of an integrated unit that stresses an appreciation for the differences...
in a global society. Teachers, students, administrators, parents, and corporate speakers collaborated to plan and implement this year-long unit.

**The Changing Face of a Student’s World**
Evidence supports the need for global education. Anderson (1990) makes three propositions on behalf of global education. First, the world has changed, especially in terms of global interdependence and increasing technological, political, cultural, economic, and ecological competitiveness among the United States and other countries.

Second, the world influences U.S. politics, demographics, and culture. Kotkin and Kishimoto (1988) also support this proposition by presenting the United States as a world nation with ethnic ties to virtually every race and region on the planet. Gollick and Chinn (1990) note that the United States has at least 276 ethnic groups, including 170 Native American groups.

Finally, social change generates educational change. Education mirrors society, and if students are to one day become adults capable of participating in a global society, we must start them on the journey now. Global education
enhances student learning by providing opportunities to explore global events and trends in their localities.

Putting the Pieces Together
In many schools, diversity education occurs during Black History Month or is strictly assigned to the foreign language department. At Springhouse Middle School, cultural diversity education is woven throughout the entire school experience and school year in a number of activities:

Foreign exchange program. Springhouse established a relationship with the Swanmore School in Swanmore, England. During the early spring months, students from Swanmore attended school at Springhouse, and during the last two weeks in June, Springhouse students attended school at Swanmore. During these visits, both groups of students experienced foreign schooling, toured historical sites, and communicated with their counterparts regularly before and after the visits. The exchange students’ presence in the schools promoted extensive discussions about U.S. and British culture and education. Students compared their schools, subjects, and school days in informal but educational conversations.

Letter exchange. In the main lobby hangs an aerial picture of the Tsuchiya Junior High School in Omiya, Japan, with the entire student body assembled in an adjacent playground. Along with the aerial picture are written proclamations, in both English and Japanese, formalizing a sister-school agreement between Springhouse and Tsuchiya. As part of the agreement, the Japanese and U.S. students write letters and poetry in the seventh grade language arts classes. Letters and poems that the students receive from students in their sister school are shared and displayed in the language arts classes.

Foreign language week. During this week, students celebrate the languages they are studying and the foreign languages spoken in many students’ homes. Selected students read the morning announcements in English and their native languages. The culminating event during this week is a feast that includes many ethnic foods from countries where the languages are spoken.

Integrated unit. A group of teachers proposed creating a unit on diversity that involved the foreign language, language arts, and social studies departments. With the support of our parent’s organization; the services of a very responsible parent; and a great deal of hard work from the faculty, the staff, and the administration, the unit led to the capstone event, Multicultural Day. In conjunction with the district’s curriculum mapping project, teachers received training in and support for instructional practices that are designed to more actively engage students in learning. In addition, teachers were encouraged to incorporate a variety of alternative assessment strategies that help students make meaning of their learning. Multicultural Day is a good example of how teachers adjusted their methods of designing curriculum, assessing student work, and presenting the curriculum.

Integration
Multicultural Day was integrated into the eighth and ninth grade language arts and foreign language classes. Rubrics directed
students to write, construct, present, and evaluate student creations in three main activities.

The Great Wall of Springhouse. Each student constructed a cultural brick that contained information about the student's heritage. These cultural bricks became a “Great Wall” that was hung on the cafeteria wall near a replica of the Statue of Liberty to relate Springhouse Middle School’s students to the immigrants who came to the United States through Ellis Island. By identifying the different backgrounds their classmates possess, students were able to better appreciate the diversity in their own school. Most students thought that diversity occurred only in the big cities, not in the upper middle class suburban community that surrounds Springhouse. Many students were surprised, then, that the wall represented more than 50 ethnic groups.

The cultural bricks started in language arts classes. Students tracked and wrote their own genealogies, interviewed relatives, shared family histories, and reviewed family artifacts. The students incorporated information from their genealogies to construct their cultural brick. One student’s cultural brick, for instance looked like an Italian flag on one half and the Swedish flag on the other, and listed many examples of Italian and Swedish culture.

Cultural scavenger hunt. During this activity, students had to answer questions about the bricks. Some sample items asked were:

- List five Springhouse students with German ancestry
- Name three Springhouse students with ancestors from two continents
- Find a Springhouse student with ancestors from the following continents: Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America
- List three Springhouse students with French ancestry.

During language arts classes, students informally presented and reviewed their answers.

International food activity. Students prepared an ethnic food with their family, then on paper, they identified their food, indicated the country and the region of the world it was from, and listed the ingredients in it. As students entered the cafeteria, they sampled at least three dishes, and wrote down the names of the foods and the countries from which they originated. In the foreign language classes, students discussed the foods they sampled and compared the various regions of the world that were represented. Again, students analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated information, and the international food activity provided students an additional opportunity to understand and appreciate cultures from around the world and people within our community.

The Culminating Event

Multicultural Day, incorporating presentations from more than 30 invited guests from our community and neighboring industries, coincided with the arrival of our British exchange students, who participated in the activities along with their new classmates. The British students were also resources for the presentations on England, and they offered their own perspectives on diversity and global education.

In their homerooms, each student received a passport, which contained the student’s personal history, their daily schedule, and their picture. When students entered the presentations, they gave their passports to the facilitators. The passports were marked with a stamp.

After an opening assembly and a slide presentation, students rotated through four sessions, each of which lasted about 20 minutes. These morning sessions comprised two presentations by invited guests who spoke about their foreign countries and cultures, the scavenger hunt at the Great Wall of Springhouse, and a presentation about international weather made by a regional news meteorologist and television celebrity. The meteorologist discussed weather from around the world, including regions of the United States. This presentation was integrated into the science curriculum, which includes a meteorology unit in which our school serves as a local weather station, complete with a weather satellite that is connected to the meteorologist’s television station.

The morning presentations focused on the acquisition of knowledge and information. Presentations consisted primarily of discussions, questions, and answers. These presentations discussed various aspects of religion, geography, education, customs, and cultural traditions. Overall, these presentations created a picture of what life is like in a particular country and culture.

The afternoon’s keynote speaker, a local college professor and former school principal, addressed the topic of diversity and the need for tolerance. The speaker related his life as an African American growing up in a predominantly White society and being the “other.” He presented his hardships and conveyed the message that if individuals believe...
in themselves, they can become anything they want. His signature to the presentation was to read the children’s book *The Little Engine That Could*.

During the afternoon sessions, students became more actively involved by creating origami and participating in such activities as martial arts and Greek dance. During the afternoon, the parents association assisted in dividing the cafeteria into five world regions for the international foods presentation and ushered students through the regions.

Students completed an evaluation after the final session and turned in their passports (a great tool for tracking student attendance).

Global education, diversity, and tolerance must be in the forefront as middle level schools across the country continue with the middle level initiative. Incorporating global education as an integrated unit of study is a means of facilitating diversity education. Multicultural Day gave teachers the opportunity to connect their subjects to others in the district’s curriculum; demonstrated to students their cultural diversity; and provided students with a general knowledge base they will carry on to their next level of education—all in the context of effective middle level practice. The day also brought the community and the parents into the building as resources and partners. As students become more sensitive, understanding, and aware of their surroundings, it won’t be long before every day is Multicultural Day.

**References**


Michael W. LaPorta Jr. (lapmw1@aol.com) is assistant principal at Springhouse Middle School in Allentown, Pa.

George P. White (gpw@lehigh.edu) is associate professor of educational leadership at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa.