The Importance of Geography

An understanding of both physical and cultural geography is no longer an option for those who would successfully navigate twenty-first century society. Global, economic, cultural, and environmental forces increasingly shape our lives. What happens in one place affects other people and other cultures. If students are to leave school equipped to earn a decent living, enjoy the richness of life and participate responsibly in local, national and international affairs, they must learn to look at the world like geographers. A strong education in geography opens the door to an expanding array of interesting jobs and careers while enriching our lives by broadening our understanding of the world in which we live.

Using This Chart (see reverse)

The Standards Scope and Sequence Chart is extracted from Canadian National Standards for Geography.* Voluntary national standards for the study of geography outline what students should know and be able to do in geography. They are organized into six "essential elements": (1) the world in spatial terms (location); (2) places and regions; (3) physical systems; (4) human systems; (5) environment and society; and (6) the uses of geography.

This chart illustrates critical content within the six elements as students progress from kindergarten to high school graduation. Teachers, parents and curriculum writers, using this tool, can now be "on the same page" as they seek to prepare their children to take their place in an ever shrinking world. We urge you to use this chart, to share it with your friends and colleagues, and to reflect on the pressing need for a geographically literate society.

Canadian National Standards for Geography

The Six Essential Elements Of Geography

1. The World in Spatial Terms. Geography studies the spatial relationships among people, places and environments. Maps reveal the complex spatial interactions that touch the lives of all citizens.

2. Places and Regions. The identities and lives of individuals and peoples are rooted in particular places and regions, each of which has distinctive human and physical characteristics.

3. Physical Systems. Physical processes shape Earth’s surface and interact with plant and animal life to create, sustain and modify the cultural and natural environment. Physical systems include such things as wind and ocean currents, plate tectonics, erosion, deposition and the water.

4. Human systems. Earth’s surface is shaped by human activities. The spatial organization of society is a mosaic of population movements, settlement patterns, economic activity, transportation, communication and political organizations.

5. Environment and Society. The physical environment has been modified by human activities. In a traditional sense, early settlers cleared the land to plant crops and graze livestock. Today, air and water pollution and the management of solid waste and hazardous materials are a serious problem. The physical environment affects human activity as well. Soil types and water availability help to determine which crops will prosper. More dramatically, natural hazards (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes and floods) have resulted in substantial loss of life and property.

6. The Uses of Geography. Understanding geography content and how to use the tools and technology available for geographic study prepares citizens for life in our modern society. Indigenous businesses and government entities use geography and maps of all kinds on a daily basis. Geography students have a wide choice of interesting and rewarding career opportunities.

The Six Essential Elements Of Geography

1. The World in Spatial Terms.

2. Places and Regions.


4. Human systems.

5. Environment and Society.

6. The Uses of Geography.
SCOPE AND SEQUENCE IN GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION: GRADES K-12

This matrix is based directly on the standards in Canadian National Standards for Geography: A Standards-Based Guide to K-12 Geography.

Grade Level Sequence

1 The World in Spatial Terms

- Geography studies the spatial relationships among people, places and environments. Maps reveal the complex spatial interactions that touch the lives of all citizens.

2 Places and Regions

- The identities and lives of people are rooted in places and regions; each of which has distinctive human and physical characteristics.

3 Physical Systems

- Physical processes shape Earth's surface and interact with plant and animal life to create, sustain and modify the cultural and natural environment. Physical systems include such things as wind and ocean currents, plate tectonics, erosion, deposition and the water cycle.

4 Human Systems

- Earth's surface is shaped by human activities. The spatial organization of society is a mosaic of population distribution, settlement patterns, economic activity, transportation, communication and political organizations.

5 Environment and Society

- The physical environment has been modified by human activities in a traditional sense, such as clearing the land to plant crops and graze livestock. Today, air pollution and the management of solid waste and hazardous materials are a serious problem. The physical environment affects human activity as well. Soil types and water availability help determine which crops will prosper. More dramatically, natural hazards (such as hurricanes and floods) have resulted in substantial loss of life and property.

6 The Uses of Geography

- Understanding geographic content and how to use the tools and technology available for geographic study teaches citizens for life in our modern society. Individuals, businesses and government enterprises use geographic maps and images of all kinds on a daily basis. Geography students have a wide choice of interesting and rewarding career opportunities.