

Highlights of *Making the Most of K-12 Educator Study Tour Programs to Asia*

Over the past decade the Freeman Foundation has contributed substantially to the accelerating interest and knowledge about Asia among educators in kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12). The Foundation's goal is to build and sustain high-quality teaching and learning about Asia in the vast majority of K-12 schools throughout the nation.

In May 2005 the Freeman Foundation funded InSites (a non-profit research, planning, and evaluation firm) to conduct a two-year investigation of the 17 study tour programs it funds for K-12 educators. The purpose of the study is to provide perspectives that will help the Freeman Foundation plan its future activities.

The Foundation provided InSites with a list of the programs to include in the study. These programs were primarily for teachers but a few were for administrators or mixed-role groups of teachers, administrators, policymakers, and others. The collective set of study tour programs funded by the Foundation has not been studied previously.

This report covers the first phase of our study. We emphasized the thirteen study tour programs for teachers. These programs offered participants learning opportunities that were complex, intense, and experiential, and evoked in their participants a passionate commitment to learning and teaching about Asia. Participants returned home with changed perspectives about Asia and an understanding of the importance of sharing their learning with students and colleagues. The study tour programs also built motivation and commitment among many participants to take action beyond their classrooms even though this was not necessarily a stated purpose of the program.

All study tour programs accomplished their primary purpose—increasing content knowledge of teachers for classroom application—as well as having an impact on participants in other ways. To illustrate,

- Ninety-seven percent of teachers who responded to our survey reported that they have gained in content knowledge about Asia that has enhanced their teaching.
- Eighty-seven percent of teachers reported a great impact on their confidence in teaching about Asia.
- Eighty-five percent said that the study tour program had broadened their international/global perspective to a great extent.
- Eighty-three percent reported a great impact on their awareness of the importance of teaching about Asia in K-12 education.
- Seventy-three percent said that their credibility with teachers and students in regards to Asia had increased to a great extent.

Although teachers returned to their schools with increased enthusiasm, confidence, and knowledge for teaching about Asia, they face competing responsibilities and an education system that often considers Asia a low priority. Two-thirds of teachers surveyed identified issues largely shaped by state, district, and/or school administrative practices and policies as constraints on embedding Asia more extensively in their schools and classrooms.

Despite these challenges, 50 percent of respondents said that the study tour programs had increased their confidence in taking leadership roles related to teaching about Asia and 43 percent reported a great interest in promoting attention to Asian studies in their school, district, community, and/or state. Teachers discovered support for increased teaching and learning about Asia both within and without the education system.

The patterns we see concerning teachers' daily teaching situations and the nature of the study tour programs have led us to posit that multiple strategies are necessary to support teachers in using what they learn through the study tour programs if they are to build and maintain attention to Asia in their classrooms and schools on a sustained basis. The three strategies we offer here for further conversation are (a) enhancing existing study tour programs for greater impact; (b) developing administrative support for teachers to teach and learn about Asia; and (c) developing peer-to-peer networking and coaching that builds incentives for teacher leaders to help maintain a focus on Asia and expand the numbers of teachers being reached through the programs.

The next step in this evaluative inquiry is to engage representatives of at least three role groups—study tour program leaders, alumni of teacher study tour programs who have expressed a strong interest in promoting teaching about Asia, and administrators—in structured conversations to explore the benefits of this collective set of strategies and determine possible ways to pilot test configurations that seem worthy of consideration.

We are interested in gaining perspectives about how the Freeman Foundation can ensure that their investment in these teachers has the biggest possible return for reaching their goal. This report will serve as the basis for framing those discussions.