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The Global Skills Schools Still Aren't Teaching

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(PHOTO: BRIDGEPORT INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY)

A generation has grown up with unprecedented access to the rest of the world, yet access has not necessarily produced connection. Nearly half of U.S. teenagers, 48%, now say social media has a mostly negative effect on people their age, according to Pew Research Center's 2025 survey. At the same time, 74% say social platforms make them feel more connected to friends. The contradiction is difficult for schools to ignore: young people can communicate constantly while still struggling with the deeper work of understanding one another.

The problem extends well beyond social media. A 2025 World Health Organization report estimates that roughly one in six people worldwide experiences loneliness, with adolescents reporting the highest rate at about 21%. The finding places young people at the center of a global social-connection problem at precisely the age when schools are expected to prepare them for adult life.

Education has traditionally measured preparation through academic credentials and university placement. Those measures remain important, but they capture only part of what students will need in workplaces and communities increasingly shaped by migration, international business, and cross-border communication. The harder educational question may be whether a student knows how to listen when another person thinks differently and remain curious when an assumption is challenged.

Cultural fluency often develops through contact. A student who shares a classroom or project with someone whose language, customs, or expectations differ may have to negotiate the small frictions that theory cannot fully reproduce. Even an awkward conversation can become an education in communication and perspective.

Bridgeport International Academy in Connecticut has built its educational model around

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that kind of daily contact. Principal Emily Zochol-Kise oversees a school of roughly 100 students representing 21 countries. Zochol-Kise views the cultural mix as part of the school's educational environment rather than a demographic statistic.

"I see a lot of patience," Zochol-Kise says of students who move through the school's international community. She has observed students arrive with firm assumptions about other cultures and gradually reconsider those ideas through everyday relationships. "Through that challenge, you see a lot of compromise happen, a lot of dialogue happen," she adds.

The learning can be surprisingly ordinary. A student may discover that a roommate has completely different expectations around personal space or communal life. Another may encounter a cultural assumption about authority that conflicts with how the school operates. Zochol-Kise has seen students work through those moments because there is no digital shortcut around a person sitting across the room.

"Learning how to slow down communication, assess if you've understood the communication, is really critical," Zochol-Kise notes. "For international students communicating in a second language, speed itself can become a barrier." The discipline of slowing down, checking meaning, and allowing mistakes can turn an uncomfortable exchange into a practical lesson in communication, according to Zochol-Kise.

The process also challenges the institution. She notes that each new culture can bring a different relationship with rules, authority, and established systems. "There has to be a certain level of openness to getting to know new spaces, and new cultures," she explains. The adults in the community have to adjust as well, making global citizenship a two-way educational process.

This approach has faced its own tests. BIA has operated for 30 years, including through the disruption of COVID-19, when Zochol-Kise notes that the school continued investing in its international relationships and eventually experienced a strong return of international students. The current environment presents another challenge as visa uncertainty affects international enrollment. Zochol-Kise notes that the residence, which can accommodate 40 students, had 26 residents at the time of the conversation despite accepted students remaining caught in visa processes.

"It is kind of core to our identity," Zochol-Kise says, "to bring international kids in, to introduce them to America, but also introduce America to these different cultures too."

That model also carries a local dimension. BIA operates in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where Zochol-Kise says international tuition has historically helped the school subsidize rates for local families who might otherwise have limited access to private education. International students themselves may come from growing middle-class countries rather than wealthy backgrounds, creating another accessibility challenge.

The school has operated without an endowment and remains tuition-driven, according to Zochol-Kise. Scholarships, she adds, function within the school's operating model. Financial support can give BIA greater room to maintain accessibility while navigating the enrollment volatility affecting international education.

If young people are expected to enter workplaces and communities where cultural differences are routine, Zochol-Kise believes that schools have an opportunity to treat those encounters as part of education itself. The ability to sit with unfamiliarity, make a mistake, listen again, and keep the conversation going may become one of the most consequential forms of preparation a school can provide.

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Zochol-Kise believes the increasingly technological nature of education makes that human element more important. "We are getting really reliant on what technology can do for us," she says. "We're losing the abilities that make us human." For her, that includes making room for mistakes, particularly in communication, because removing every mistake can also remove an opportunity to learn from it.

BIA's future will depend partly on whether it can preserve that international character while remaining accessible to the families it serves. Zochol-Kise is seeking financial support and strategic relationships that can provide stability for scholarships and future growth, particularly as the rules governing international mobility continue to shift.

A connected world does not automatically create connected citizens. Schools still have to create places where young people encounter differences in person, work through the discomfort it can create, and discover that understanding another perspective is a skill worth practicing. In an era of instant communication, learning how to genuinely meet another person can be one of the slowest lessons, and one of the most necessary.

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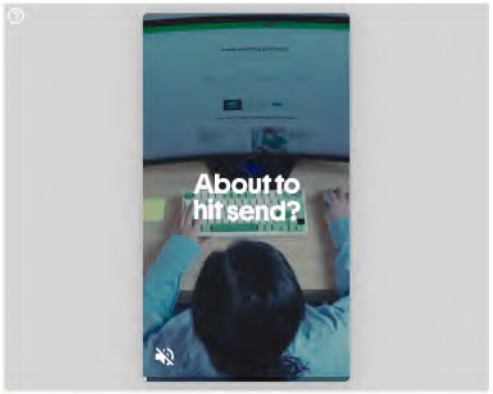
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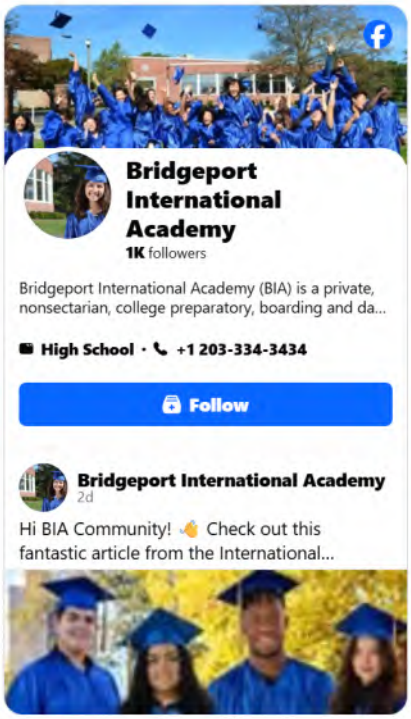
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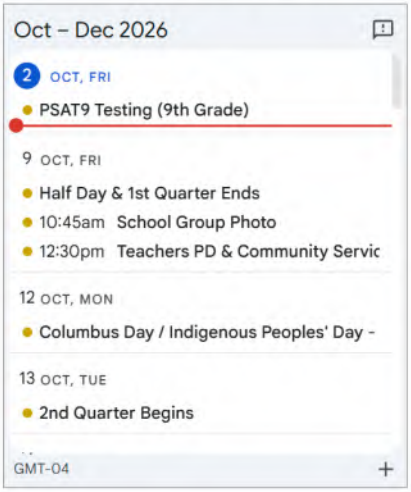
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Mrs. Emily Kise (Faculty)

"Faculty are invested in a holistic approach to academics. Since we keep our numbers low, teachers are able to focus on the student and their individual growth. They know strengths and weaknesses and are able to challenge individual students appropriately to optimize growth"



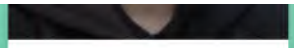
Nate Peele (Student)

"BIA school has been truly great to me for the past 2 years. The teachers at BIA school are not only highly knowledgeable in their respective fields, but they also genuinely care about their students' success."



Jeanne Bessell (Parent)

"I can not think of any better school where I would want my kids to be. Great environment, great teachers, great kids. I love BIA!"



Keita Yamada (Alumnus)

"BIA is a very open and accepting family. It has vastly improved my capabilities to socialize, and learn new discoveries with peers from around the world."

ABOUT

Bridgeport International Academy, where students meet the world!

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