



Teaching about Asia in American Schools

# KEYS TO SUCCESS

National Consortium for Teaching about Asia

The National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA), funded by the Freeman Foundation, is a multiyear initiative to encourage and facilitate teaching and learning about China, Japan, and Korea in world history, geography, social studies, and literature courses. Launched in 1998, this nationwide program is a collaboration of the East Asian Studies programs of five national institutions: Columbia University, the Five College Center for East Asian Studies, Indiana University, the University of Colorado, and the University of Washington. By 2003, they had been joined by more than 100 seminar leaders in numerous Asian study programs and other organizations nationally. Since its inception, NCTA has established introductory seminars for teachers in 42 states.

The Freeman Foundation's major objectives include strengthening the bonds of friendship between the United States and the countries of East Asia through educational endeavors.

For more information about NCTA, see [www.nctasia.org](http://www.nctasia.org).



## KEYS TO SUCCESS

**W**hy study about Asia? The Asian region is increasingly the focus of U.S. economic and security interests. The study of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean societies, history, cultures, and art is critical to ensuring that today's students are well-informed, global citizens. In the words of a student learning about Asia: "You start to realize the whole world isn't like the country you live in." Another student said, "You just understand people better this way." Students are gaining new perspectives on Asian people, places, and cultures, thanks to the work of the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA).

NCTA's primary goal is to encourage ongoing teaching and learning about Asia in American middle and high schools by focusing directly on increasing teachers' knowledge of Asia. The consortium helps teachers build a presence for Asia in schools by offering intellectually stimulating seminars for teachers; stipends for materials; and scholarly works about the history, cultures, and literature of East Asia. New learning opportunities also are provided for seminar alumni. NCTA nurtures teachers' initiative and their commitment to spreading their learning about Asia to their colleagues.

This multiyear initiative has been funded by the Freeman Foundation since 1998. By 2003, more than 3,500 teachers had participated in nearly 200 NCTA seminars in 42 states.

"We are victims of our own educational experiences, and to change student perceptions it is vital to first open up teachers' eyes."

— *district administrator*

"Before I got involved, all Asian people looked alike. I really didn't know about the history. I had a great void in knowledge."

— *middle school media specialist*

InSites, a nonprofit research and planning organization based in Colorado, conducted this evaluation of NCTA. During 2003, the InSites team visited and studied 16 schools to learn more about how participants are using what they learned in NCTA seminars. They interviewed NCTA and non-NCTA teachers, seminar leaders, administrators, students, parents, and others. InSites also sent surveys to more than 900 seminar participants. Of these, 60 percent responded. Finally, InSites sent surveys to all 89 NCTA seminar leaders who had led seminars from 1999 to 2002. More than 90 percent of the seminar leaders responded. Figures in the report are derived from those who responded to the surveys. For more details on the evaluation methods and results, see [www.insites.org](http://www.insites.org).

## HIGHLIGHTS OF NCTA'S IMPACT

NCTA and the Freeman Foundation asked InSites, a nonprofit research firm in Colorado, to evaluate its work to date. InSites visited schools; spoke to participants, seminar leaders, and others; and conducted in-depth surveys in 2003. InSites' findings form the basis of this report.

The evaluation shows the initiative is successfully:

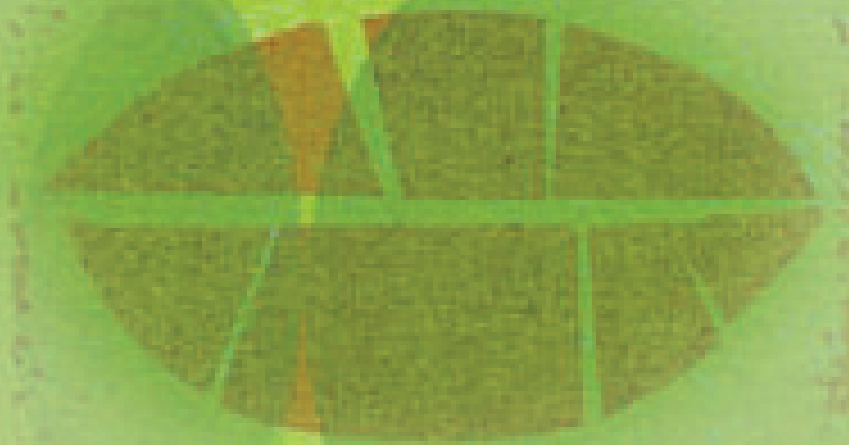
- ❖ **Preparing teachers to teach about Asia.** The vast majority of seminar participants complete the program with increased content knowledge about Asia, more resources to help them bring Asia into their classrooms, increased confidence in their ability to teach about Asia, more instructional strategies, and a heightened awareness of the importance of teaching about Asia. Seminars also inspired teachers to seek additional professional development opportunities.
- ❖ **Enriching the content of Asia in classrooms.** The seminars helped teachers better understand how to infuse Asian studies into the curriculum. Teachers spent more instructional time on Asia, and they increased the depth of teaching about Asian topics. They also demonstrated a readiness to find additional materials to supplement their instruction.
- ❖ **Working toward creating a more long-term presence for Asia in American schools.** NCTA teachers are sharing their knowledge, resources, and skills with non-NCTA colleagues. As a result, they are increasing opportunities for students in other classes to learn about Asia. Schools with multiple NCTA participants reported that participants continued to collaborate on-site after they completed the program. Activities such as team teaching, schoolwide Asia-related events, and new units and courses helped build the presence of Asia in their schools.

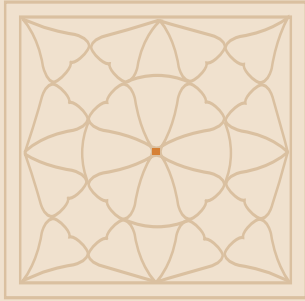
“The opportunity to work with [NCTA] really propelled integrating content about Asia into the curriculum.”

— *high school history teacher*

“The seminar leader has allowed me to look at Asia from a social, economic, religious, and political perspective. It opened up a whole new world for me, to the point that I enrolled in a one-week program to learn more.”

— *teacher, assistant principal*





### **National Coordinators Administer NCTA Program**

Leaders in five coordinating sites, who work with institutions across the country, administer the NCTA program. They provide support and guidance to seminar leaders who are carefully selected to ensure they have a rich array of expertise and experience in Asian studies.


To learn more about NCTA seminars, see [www.nctasia.org](http://www.nctasia.org).

## HOW THE NCTA PROGRAM WORKS

Leaders in five national coordinating sites administer the program and provide ongoing support to Asia experts and educators who lead comprehensive seminars, the cornerstone of the NCTA program, for teachers. Each site is housed in a university-based Asian Studies center that has a longstanding commitment to provide rich content about Asia to teachers.

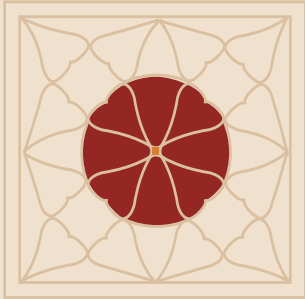
National coordinators carefully select seminar leaders with extensive expertise or interest in Asian studies. InSites learned that seminar leaders offer a rich and diverse array of experiences and backgrounds, as well as a passion for teaching about Asian studies. In addition to leading seminars, many hold full-time positions with universities, public schools, or cultural affairs organizations. A majority of seminar leaders conduct sessions themselves and use guest lecturers.

Seminar leaders rely on the national coordinators for assistance, resources, and materials. Seminar leaders surveyed by InSites gave national coordinators high marks: 90 percent gave their national coordinator the highest possible rating when asked about their level of helpfulness.



“There was no interest in Asia before NCTA came on the scene. It has definitely promoted more teaching about Asia.”

— *parent of high school student*



### **Seminars Teach Participants about Asia**

Seminars focusing on East Asian studies are the cornerstone of the NCTA program. Participants are selected based in part on their commitment to integrate Asian studies into their curriculum. By 2003, more than 3,500 teachers in 42 states had participated in nearly 200 seminars.

## SEMINAR DESIGN, LEADERSHIP, AND PARTICIPATION

Held in locations across the country that are convenient for local teachers, seminars focus on East Asian history and cultures and draw on Chinese, Japanese, and Korean traditions. The seminars are tailored to the needs and curricula of participating teachers and school districts.

NCTA targets middle and high school teachers of history, geography, world cultures, social studies, and language arts and literature. Participants are selected in part based on their commitment to integrate Asian studies into their curriculum. Teachers must attend all 30 hours of the seminar and at least one meeting after the seminar concludes.

Participants surveyed and interviewed by InSites praised the seminars, pointing to the content-rich resource materials and the opportunities to network with other teachers. Teachers said that the “power of the seminars” comes from the leaders’ knowledge of and passion for Asia.

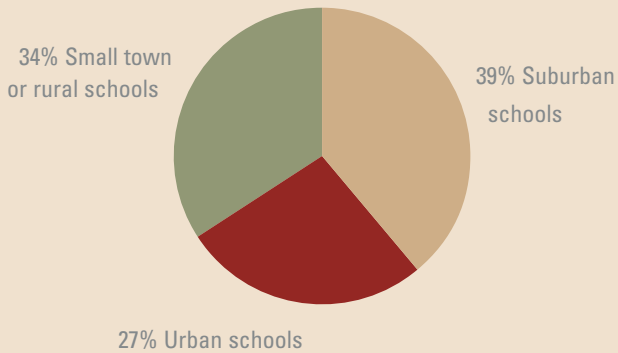
“It’s a three-legged stool. You need content. You need pedagogy. You need cheerleading. If you don’t have those three legs to stand on, the seminar crashes.”

— *seminar leader*

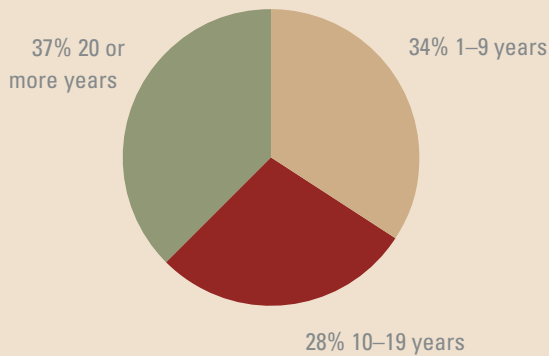
Seminar leaders also are effective at tailoring content so it is useful to teachers in the classroom. For example, seminars provide opportunities for participants to integrate what they are studying with district and state standards. Seminar leaders report sharing copies of district standards with guest lecturers so their presentations reflect what participants need to know.



### Where do NCTA participants teach?



### How long have NCTA participants taught?\*



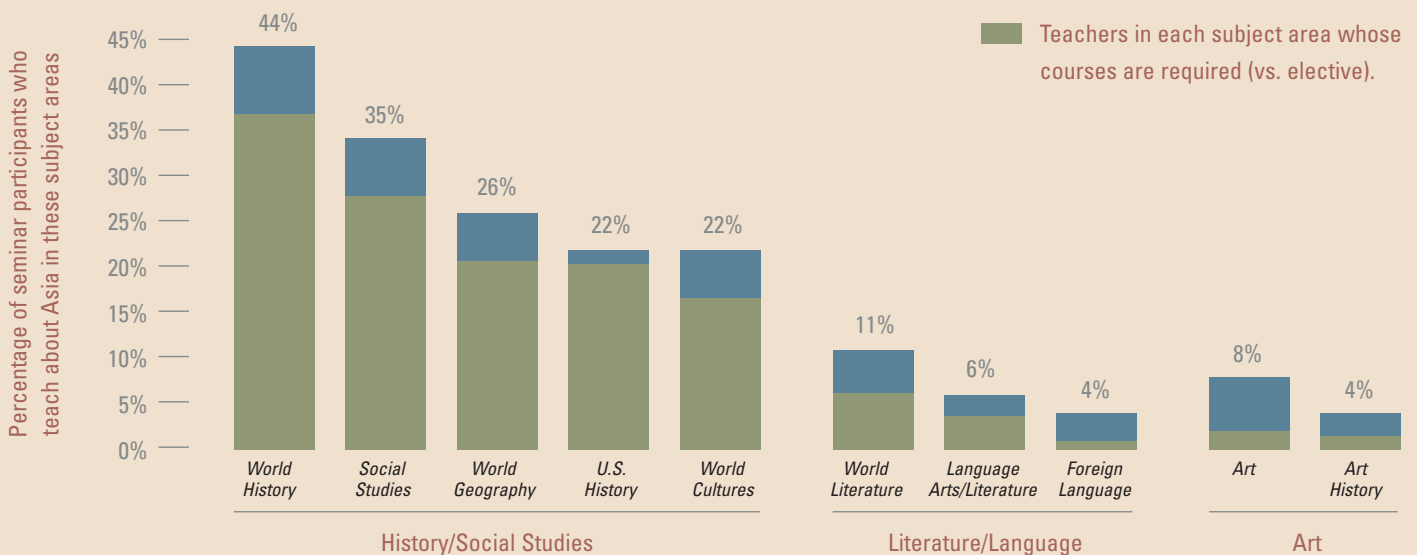
\* The numbers add to less than 100 percent since some respondents did not report this information.

### The Power of NCTA Seminars

*Why are teachers so positive about NCTA seminars?*

- Quality instruction about Asia from leading experts in the field
- 30-hour seminars scheduled across several weeks to allow time for reading and reflection
- Rigorous content balanced with readings, classroom applications, and discussion
- Required development of lesson plans and implementation plans to jump-start participants on classroom application
- Professional stipend upon completion of seminar and implementation plan
- Seminar materials for participants
- Teaching materials on Asia for school library or teacher resource center
- Atmosphere of collegial respect: high expectations, challenging assignments, and practical conversations about student learning
- Additional stipend after participation in follow-up sessions that discuss classroom applications
- Opportunities to compete for participation in study tours to China, Japan, and Korea
- Course credit or recertification credit (available at some locations)

### What subjects do NCTA participants teach?

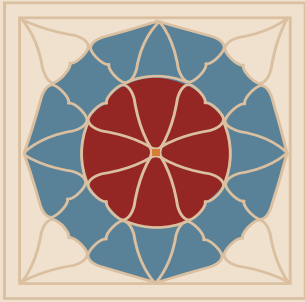


“The seminar leader made history come alive. There was so much information in a short time ... and they hooked us up to so many neat resources and books. I wanted to go back [to school] and not do anything else but Asia.”

— *middle school teacher*

InSites found that many seminar participants have little prior knowledge of Asia. NCTA builds in time for reflection and study by scheduling the seminars over a period of time. As one participant commented, “The advantage of once per week was that I had time to read, do the studies, and get prepared for the class.” Seminar leaders also require teachers to produce lesson plans and implementation plans so that teachers understand the practical applications of their new knowledge. Both teachers and seminar leaders attest to the value of developing the plans.

In a follow-up session that occurs within a year of the seminar, teachers are invited to share their lesson plans and experiences. This is significant because many professional development activities fail to bring participants together later for reflection. This unique approach provides an incentive for participants to apply what they have learned in the seminars because they know they will meet again with the seminar leader and their peers to reflect on lessons learned and effective practices.



### Participants Teach Asian Perspectives

The impact of NCTA's seminars on teachers is noteworthy. Teachers become more effective at offering Asian perspectives and supplementing information in textbooks because they have a deeper understanding of Asian cultures and are inspired to seek more professional growth opportunities on their own.

### Impact on Teachers

*To what extent*

*did you gain each of*

*the following from your participation in the NCTA seminar? I gained "A Lot" (4) or "Very Much" (5)\**

Increased content knowledge about Asia	93%
More resources relevant to my teaching about Asia	93%
Increased confidence in my ability to teach about Asia	90%
More ways to teach about Asia	84%
Increased awareness of the importance of teaching about Asia	82%

\* Respondents gave a rating of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The percentage who responded with either a 4 or 5 are shown in the table.

## NCTA'S IMPACT ON TEACHERS

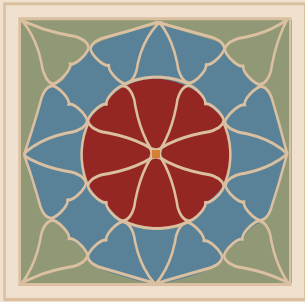
InSites' evaluation revealed that the seminars broadened teachers' personal awareness of cultures less familiar to them and enhanced their ability to teach Asian perspectives. The deeper understanding of Asian cultures helped reduce teachers' dependency on textbooks and gave them confidence to use rich supplementary materials in their classes. NCTA seminars also inspired participants to seek additional professional growth experiences related to Asia. Fifty-two percent of the seminar participants that responded to the survey reported spending 30 hours or more in Asia-related professional development since their NCTA seminar. In contrast, the same percentage had spent 10 or fewer hours in Asia-related professional development in the *decade* prior to NCTA.

“My knowledge of China before the seminar was almost nil. Now when I hear something about China, I’m thinking about how I can incorporate that into what I do.”

— *high school teacher*

“What I find most exciting is teaching Chinese culture. All of a sudden the students go, ‘Wow! There are perspectives other than American perspectives on things.’ That just changes your whole idea of the world.”

— *high school history teacher*



### Teachers Embed Asian Studies in the Classroom

After participating in the NCTA program, teachers expand their coverage of Asia in the classroom by adding novels and other materials to help students understand Asian history and culture.

### Want to Learn More?

Interested in learning more about schools in which teachers participated in the NCTA program? See [www.nctasia.org](http://www.nctasia.org) and [www.insites.org](http://www.insites.org) for case studies that show how teachers successfully integrated Asian studies into their courses and built a presence for Asia in their schools.

## NCTA'S IMPACT IN THE CLASSROOM

InSites found that NCTA participants are infusing seminar content and materials into their classroom instruction in new and creative ways and making cross-discipline connections. Teachers told InSites they are excited about how NCTA has influenced their teaching and how their students are eager to learn more. “The kids are unaware that these societies are thousands of years old,” a high school history teacher told InSites. “They love learning about the inventions. They are amazed that the Chinese created gunpowder and had paper long before the Europeans. They had no idea that the Chinese explored long before the Europeans and had ships that were five times as big. Things like that they find interesting.”

Seminar participants spoke about expanding their coverage of Asia in world history and world cultures courses—“instead of it being a little extra.” Teachers are using materials written by Asians and adding novels to increase student understanding of the history and cultures of East Asia. They also are addressing Asian content in textbooks that they had previously skipped altogether. History and social studies were the most common courses that saw more emphasis on Asian content, although teachers of geography, literature, and art, as well as media specialists, made changes in their approaches to teaching and promoting Asia.

The look of the classroom also has changed as teachers and students become more immersed in studying China, Japan, Korea, and other Asian countries. Teachers are using artifacts students can see up close and touch. They have developed creative displays about Asian history and literature. And they have tapped community resources to enrich students' classroom experience.

### Useful Components of NCTA Seminars

To what extent have each of the following been useful to you in your teaching about Asia? *I gained "A Lot" (4) or "Very Much" (5)\**

Seminar course materials	82%
Content covered in seminar	80%
Library materials purchased with NCTA grant	75%
Lesson plans or implementation plan you developed for the seminar	75%
Lesson plans or implementation plan received during the seminar	60%

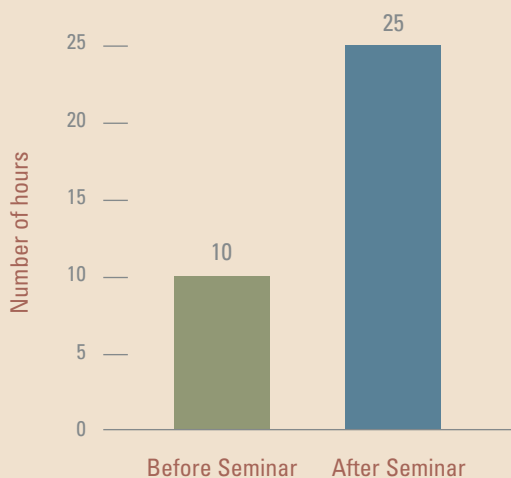
\* Respondents gave a rating of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The percentage who responded with either a 4 or 5 are shown in the table.

### Changes in Classroom Teaching Since NCTA Seminar

Since taking the NCTA seminar, are you: *"Yes"*  
(yes, no)

Teaching different content about Asia?	93%
Using more varied resources to teach about Asia?	91%
Spending more time teaching about Asia?	82%
Revising objectives/outcomes for units on Asia?	78%

### Median Number of Hours Spent Teaching about Asia



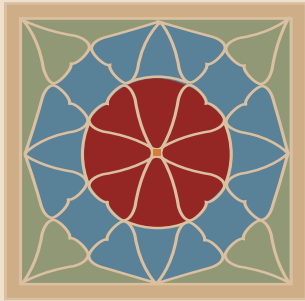
“The kids love it. They are coming from a culturally sheltered town so they have stereotypes in their heads, such as ‘all Asians are good at math and science.’ My stories and the videos of today’s Asia really open their eyes to what it is like over there. They love the food and the writing. They ask questions.”

— *high school history teacher*

### More or Different Content

If you are teaching more or different content about Asia since taking the seminar, to what extent does the content now reflect the following characteristics as compared to *"A Lot" (4) or "Very Much" (5)\** before the seminar?

Gives students a deeper understanding of one or more aspects of Asian culture, history, and/or geography	86%
Gives students a broader familiarity with many aspects of Asian culture, history, and/or geography	85%
Asks students to appreciate more perspectives on Asia	82%
Gives students opportunities to work with more varied resources on Asia	73%
Gives more attention to Asia-related current events	71%
Asks students to work more often with primary sources on Asia	59%
Makes links more often to other courses at my school in which Asia is relevant	57%



### Participants Help Integrate Asian Studies in School

Seminar participants are leaders in their schools. They help other teachers integrate Asian studies into their curricula, plan schoolwide attention to Asia, and initiate student exchanges with schools in China and Japan.

### Teacher Sharing and Leadership

To what extent are the following statements "A Lot" (4) or true about your school? "Very Much" (5)\*

I have shared my learning from the seminar with my colleagues.	68%
I am taking an active leadership role in encouraging the teaching of Asia in the curriculum.	52%

\* Respondents gave a rating of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The percentage who responded with either a 4 or 5 are shown in the table.

## NCTA'S IMPACT IN SCHOOLS

### INCREASED TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Teachers who have participated in an NCTA seminar become a strong resource for their colleagues. Many in leadership roles—department chairs, mentors to new teachers, members of curriculum committees, and informal experts—are using their leverage to share what they have learned in NCTA seminars with others in their schools. Although NCTA does not require participants to share what they have learned with other teachers, 68 percent report extensive sharing with their colleagues, and more than half are taking an active role in encouraging the teaching of Asia in the curriculum.

Collaboration among NCTA teachers and non-NCTA teachers also seems to increase after teachers complete the seminars, according to the InSites' study. Team teaching and the coordination of content across subject areas were among the strategies cited most often. In schools in Ohio, New York, Washington, Tennessee, California, and other states, this collaborative work has resulted in significant curriculum changes—new units or courses—that expose students to Asian content in more tangible and ongoing ways. Other NCTA participants brought schoolwide attention to Asia, acted as informal mentors, provided professional development, and initiated other projects such as student exchanges with schools in China and Japan.

### ENHANCED ASIA-RELATED RESOURCES IN SCHOOLS

Another way NCTA has had an impact on schools is by offering high-quality resources (e.g., books and videos) to classrooms and school media centers. Teachers spoke enthusiastically about these resources. In some schools, NCTA teachers and media specialists are promoting widespread use of NCTA resources through the creation of Asian Resource Centers. Schools with multiple NCTA participants also benefited when teachers pooled the funding they received from NCTA to buy additional materials. NCTA awards schools a \$300 materials stipend for each teacher who completes the seminar.

“No other English teachers took [the NCTA seminar], so our job was basically to train the whole English staff on Japanese and Chinese literature. We made a packet so that they could teach themselves.”

— *high school English teacher*

“Among the three of us we had \$900. So we selected materials that would cut through the entire curriculum. All the things we received doubled the Asian collection in our library.”

— *high school social studies teacher*

“To spend a month in the culture is just transforming in some ways. I don’t think that you ever can be quite the same.”

— *high school English teacher*

**What Conditions Support a Sustained Presence for Asia in Schools?**

- Critical mass of teachers teaching about Asia
- Curriculum standards and requirements that include Asia
- Availability of professional development on Asia
- Teacher leadership and collaboration
- Access to resources on Asia
- Testing about Asia
- Administrative support for inclusion of Asia
- Asia-related initiatives in schools and communities
- Parent and community support
- Certification requirements that encourage teacher learning about Asia

**Support for a Sustained Presence for Asia in Schools**

*To what extent are the following statements "A Lot" (4) or true about your school? "Very Much" (5)\**

Teachers at my school have access to professional development on Asia.	44%
Teachers at my school have adequate classroom resources to teach about Asia.	31%
My principal is playing a leadership role in encouraging the teaching of Asia in the curriculum.	17%

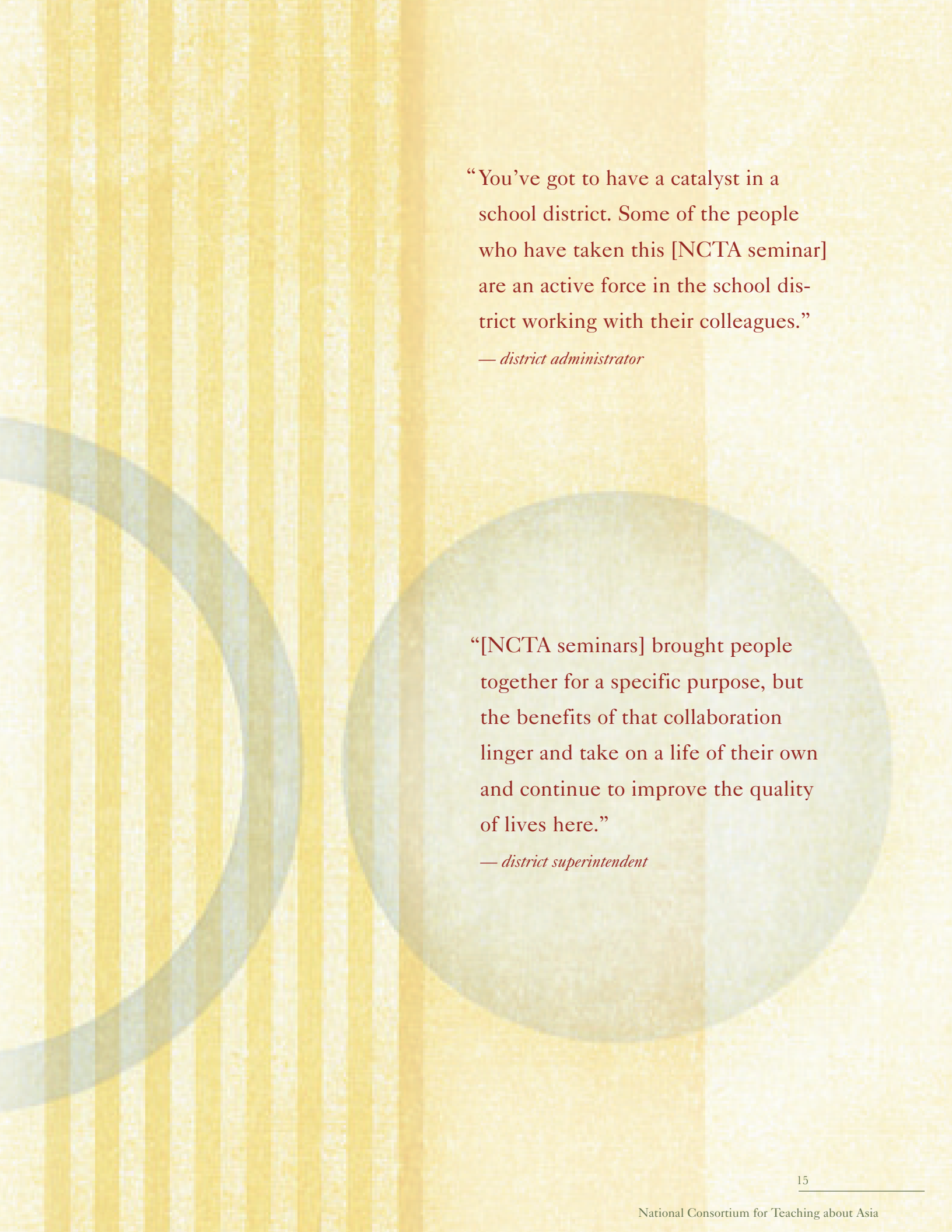
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# NCTA SUPPORT FOR FOSTERING ONGOING ASIAN STUDIES IN SCHOOLS

NCTA is grounded in the belief that classroom teachers are central to building a place for Asian studies in U.S. schools. At the same time, NCTA recognizes that teachers cannot do it alone. A strong and sustained presence for Asia in American classrooms is nurtured and supported—or destroyed and dismissed—by what is happening in the school, in the curriculum, and beyond. Some NCTA participants joined the program because it met recertification requirements. Some have found administrative support for their efforts to bring in content on Asia, while others choose to include it despite administrative indifference. The availability of professional development on Asia affects teachers’ ability to build a critical mass of support for the study of Asia. Through enrichment activities and study tours for seminar alumni, NCTA helps teachers keep the study of Asia alive and growing in their schools.

Knowing the teachers’ eagerness for ongoing learning opportunities and the value of firsthand experience, NCTA added study tours two years after the initiative began. Seminar participants who traveled to East Asia on study tours spoke enthusiastically about the personal and professional impact of these experiences. They returned with a deeper understanding of the culture, a desire to teach more about Asia, and a readiness to share their experiences with others. NCTA is adding other enrichment activities—one-day workshops, reunions for seminar participants with presentations by Asian specialists, visits to museums, and links to other professional development opportunities. NCTA national coordinators believe these activities will continually enrich teachers’ knowledge and commitment to building a sustained presence of Asia in their schools and classrooms.





“You’ve got to have a catalyst in a school district. Some of the people who have taken this [NCTA seminar] are an active force in the school district working with their colleagues.”

— *district administrator*

“[NCTA seminars] brought people together for a specific purpose, but the benefits of that collaboration linger and take on a life of their own and continue to improve the quality of lives here.”

— *district superintendent*

### **Acknowledgments**

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### **The following individuals served on the InSites evaluation team:**

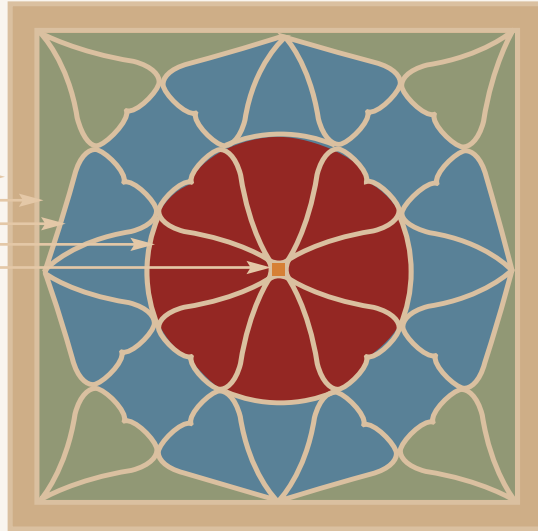
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Carol Bosserman  
Sally Boyd  
Kelly Chamberlain  
Jill Conrad  
Zaretta Hammond  
Dawn Hanson Smart  
Pat Jessup  
Karl Johnson  
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## THE CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR NCTA

NCTA recognizes that a major challenge for the program is continuing to attract teachers eager to learn and to apply the knowledge they gain about Asia despite competing demands on curriculum and instruction, increasing state and federal mandates, and tight budgets. Those competing demands likely influenced these findings: Only 17 percent of teachers report that their school is close to having a well-established place for Asia, and 29 percent say their school is somewhat close. Knowing that its work is far from done, NCTA is building on its first five years of operation, considering new program activities, and collaborating with others who share its goals.



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*This diagram was inspired by gardens in Suzhou, China.*

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