



Please go to page 3, 4, & 5 to see chart of how the US matches up to other countries.

Articles

Vouchers

Our Choice Plan

Model Legislation

International Test Scores

Gatto Angry!

Teacher Pay

New Zealand Success

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International Test Scores

Poor U.S. Test Results Tied To Weak Curriculum

Most of the following was excerpted from a [speech](#) by Pascal D. Forgione, Jr., Ph.D. U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics. As a government researcher, he tries to put the best possible spin on the academic failure of American schools, but this is no sugar-coated report. [math scores](#) [science scores](#)

This is No Sugar-coated Report

Math and science offer the only common basis for comparing American schools to the rest of the world. Other subjects vary from one country to another. Results of the **Third International Mathematics and Science Study** (TIMSS) involving a half-million students in 41 countries are authoritative. Oversight groups included not only the

world's leading experts on comparative studies of education systems, but also experts in assessment design and statistical analysis.

Comparisons are Fair Traditionally, the most common criticism of international studies is that it is unfair to compare our results to other countries because their national scores are based on a highly selective population. While this may have been true in the past, it is simply not valid in the case of TIMSS. Using several different methods of measuring enrollment, the data indicate that the enrollment rate in the United States is closer to the international average than to the desirable upper extreme. Even the theory that higher secondary enrollment rates hurt a country's overall achievement did not hold true. Students in countries with higher enrollment rates tended to score significantly higher on both the math and science general knowledge assessments. Higher secondary enrollment rates are associated with higher levels of performance, rather than the reverse. The range of scores, from high to low, is no greater in the United States than in the higher-scoring countries.

Participants This study included primarily the industrialized countries of Europe but also the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Asia. So-called third world countries that have a higher literacy rate than the U.S., like Costa Rica, and others that contribute a significant number of U.S. advance degreed immigrants, like India, were not part of this study; therefore, the results in terms of world competition are worse than portrayed in these charts.

Results In short, the tests showed U.S. fourth-graders performing poorly, middle school students worse, and high school students are unable to compete. By the same criteria used to say we were "average" in elementary school, "we appear to be "near the bottom" at the high school level. People have a tendency to think this picture is bleak but it doesn't apply to their own school. Chances are, even if your school compares well in SAT scores, it will still be a lightweight on an international scale.

1. By the time our students are ready to leave high school - ready to enter higher education and the labor force - they are doing so badly with science they are significantly weaker than their peers in other countries.
2. Our idea of "advanced" is clearly below international standards.
3. There appears to be a consistent weakness in our teaching performance in physical sciences that becomes magnified over the years.

Causes for Failure One would think that with our vastly superior resources and the level of education spending which far exceeds these competitors we would outperform nearly everyone - not so. Dr. Schmidt, who oversees the research effort into the TIMSS results, says the actual cause for the failures appears to be weak math and science curricula in U.S. middle schools.

A more insightful explanation was once proffered by Jean McLaughlin, president of Barry University who confided "The public schools lack focus; instead of concentrating on education, they dabble in social re-engineering". That assessment was confirmed by the superintendent of the country's fourth largest school district in Miami-Dade, Florida who said "Half our job is education, and the other half is social work".

Downward sloping performance confirms John Taylor Gatto's thesis in his book **Dumbing Us Down** and his [speeches](#) which charge compulsory government education with deliberately producing robots instead of adults who are the best they can be.

Curricula The biggest deficits are found at the middle school level. In middle school, most countries shift curricula from basic arithmetic and elementary science in the direction of chemistry, physics, algebra and geometry. Even poor countries generally teach a half-year of algebra and a half-year of geometry to every eighth-grader.

In U.S. middle schools, however, most students continue to review arithmetic. And they are more likely to study earth science and life science than physics or chemistry.

Teachers Among teachers of high school biology and life sciences classes, approximately 31 percent of them do not have at least a minor in biology. Among high school physical science teachers, over half, 55 percent, do not have at least a minor in any of the physical sciences. Again we might question the focus of the teachers on social re-engineering instead of subject areas.

Textbooks U.S. textbooks treat topics with a "mile-wide, inch-deep" approach, Schmidt said. A typical U.S. eighth-grade math textbook deals with about 35 topics. By comparison, a Japanese or German math textbook for that age would have only five or six topics. Comparisons done elsewhere between French and American math books show more innovative approaches to finding, for instance, the volume of a pyramid. Fractions don't lend themselves to computerization, so they're relegated to an importance slightly above Roman numerals. Calculators are here to stay, so kids breeze through long division. They concentrate on how to *use* math rather than how to *do* math, and with less entanglement in social philosophy.



American Education Not World Class

The schools systematically let kids down. By grade 4, American students only score

in the middle of 26 countries reported. By grade 8 they are in the bottom third, and at the finish line, where it really counts, we're near dead last. Its even worse when you notice that **some of the superior countries in grade 8 (especially the Asians) were not included in published 12th grade results. They do not need 12 grades.**

Math

Grade 4			Grade 8		Grade 12	
Rank	Nation	Score	Nation	Score	Nation	Score
1.	Singapore	625	Singapore	643	Netherlands	560
2.	Korea	611	Korea	607	Sweden	552
3.	Japan	597	Japan	605	Denmark	547
4.	Hong Kong	587	Hong Kong	588	Switzerland	540
5.	Netherlands	577	Belgium	565	Iceland	534
6.	Czech Republic	567	Czech Republic	564	Norway	528
7.	Austria	559	Slovak Republic	547	France	523
8.	Slovenia	552	Switzerland	545	New Zealand	522
9.	Ireland	550	Netherlands	541	Australia	522
10.	Hungary	548	Slovenia	541	Canada	519
11.	Australia	546	Bulgaria	540	Austria	518
12.	United States	545	Austria	539	Slovenia	512
13.	Canada	532	France	538	Germany	495
14.	Israel	531	Hungary	537	Hungary	483
15.	Latvia	525	Russian Fed.	535	Italy	476
16.	Scotland	520	Australia	530	Russian Fed.	471
17.	England	513	Ireland	527	Lithuania	469
18.	Cyprus	502	Canada	527	Czech Republic	466
19.	Norway	502	Belgium	526	United States	461
20.	New Zealand	499	Sweden	519	Cyprus	446
21.	Greece	492	Thailand	522	South Africa	356
22.	Thailand	490	Israel	522		
23.	Portugal	475	Germany	509		
24.	Iceland	474	New Zealand	508		
25.	Iran	429	England	506		
26.	Kuwait	400	Norway	503		
27.			Denmark	502		
28.			United States	500		
29.			Scotland	498		
30.			Latvia	493		
31.			Spain	487		
32.			Iceland	487		
33.			Greece	484		

34.	Romania	482
35.	Lithuania	477
36.	Cyprus	474
37.	Portugal	454
38.	Iran	428
39.	Kuwait	392
40.	Colombia	385
41.	South Africa	354
Grade Average 529		Grade Average 513
Grade Average 500		



Science

Grade 4			Grade 8		Grade 12	
Rank	Nation	Score	Nation	Score	Nation	Score
1.	Korea	597	Singapore	607	Sweden	559
2.	Japan	574	Czech Republic	574	Netherlands	558
3.	United States	565	Japan	571	Iceland	549
4.	Austria	565	Korea	565	Norway	544
5.	Australia	562	Bulgaria	565	Canada	532
6.	Netherlands	557	Netherlands	560	New Zealand	529
7.	Czech Republic	557	Slovenia	560	Australia	527
8.	England	551	Austria	558	Switzerland	523
9.	Canada	549	Hungary	554	Austria	520
10.	Singapore	547	England	552	Slovenia	517
11.	Slovenia	546	Belgium	550	Denmark	509
12.	Ireland	539	Australia	545	Germany	497
13.	Scotland	536	Slovak Republic	544	France	487
14.	Hong Kong	533	Russian Fed.	538	Czech Republic	487
15.	Hungary	532	Ireland	538	Russian Fed.	481
16.	New Zealand	531	Sweden	535	United States	480
17.	Norway	530	United States	534	Italy	475
18.	Latvia	512	Germany	531	Hungary	471
19.	Israel	505	Canada	531	Lithuania	461
20.	Iceland	505	Norway	527	Cyprus	448
21.	Greece	497	New Zealand	525	South Africa	349
22.	Portugal	480	Thailand	525		
23.	Cyprus	475	Israel	524		
24.	Thailand	473	Hong Kong	522		
25.	Iran	416	Switzerland	522		
26.	Kuwait	401	Scotland	517		

[15 others](#)

Grade Average 524 Grade Average 516 Grade Average 500



For years, people have taken false comfort in the notion that while the performance of all our students may be poor, our strength lies in our top students. Many people believe that our best students perform better than the best students of most other countries. TIMSS shows this notion to be untrue. **Note again that many superior countries (especially the Asians) are not included in the reported results.**

Grade 12 Top Students

	Advanced Math		Advanced Science	
Rank	Nation	Score	Nation	Score
1.	France	557	Norway	581
2.	Russian Fed.	542	Sweden	573
3.	Switzerland	533	Russian Fed.	545
4.	Australia	525	Denmark	534
5.	Denmark	522	Slovenia	523
6.	Cyprus	518	Germany	522
7.	Lithuania	516	Australia	518
8.	Greece	513	Cyprus	494
9.	Sweden	512	Latvia	488
10.	Canada	509	Switzerland	488
11.	Slovenia	475	Greece	486
12.	Italy	474	Canada	485
13.	Czech Republic	469	France	466
14.	Germany	465	Czech Republic	451
15.	United States	442	Austria	435
16.	Austria	436	United States	423
	Grade Average	501	Grade Average	501



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Comment In 1983, [A Nation At Risk](#) urgently recommended reforms in education warning "the United States is under challenge from many quarters". Today we're at greater risk than ever. The Government Education Monopoly continues to imperil our economy by failing miserably at preparing the workforce. Business increasingly looks for talent overseas. The world's greatest concentration of PhD's is in Seoul, Korea and half of Americans can't even find Seoul on a map.

Microsoft India taps Indian programming and engineering skills with 83,000

certifications issued in 1999. We import 107,000 **H-1B** professionals every year, half of them with PhD's.

Unless we re-tool education, there is a strong likelihood that America will get overtaken in education the way we did in automobiles. Before the 70's our economy was based on the automobile, but a complacent automobile industry failed to make changes. Japanese cars invaded, and canceled our dominance. The resulting outflow of dollars to Japan devastated our economy. Its about to happen again, this time to pay high salaries to well-educated workers overseas.

Doing it Right One does not need to scurry around trying to devise a plan to extricate ourselves from this mess. The simplest way to improve American education (public, private, and parochial) quickly is to adopt books and teaching methods from countries at the top of the ranking. During ten years of he cultural revolution, South Korea adopted the U.S. System, dumping it when their results nosedived. Several **International Baccalaureate** schools have gotten dual accreditation from the participating sister country when they met the higher standards required abroad. In our own case, that required an extra hour of instruction each day, and phys-ed in a foreign language. One such government school nicknamed "teacher heaven" was organized by principal Lois Lindahl in Miami, Florida. Her motto is "Children will perform to the level of your expectations".

Sources:

Download the summary TIMSS report in PDF format

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs99/1999081.pdf>

Full text and charts of Forgione speech:

<http://nces.ed.gov/Pressrelease/science/index.html>

See also: <http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/news/news-briefs/1999/curriculum.htm>

Kill the messenger: Dr. Forgione's re-nomination as U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics was blocked by the Clinton/Gore administration. Forgione is now Superintendent of the Austin Independent School District.

More Info:

[Boston College International Study Center](#) originated TIMSS. It has timely updates and more data.

[Grandfather Education Report](#) presenting graphs, data, and analysis that tells the stark truth.



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