

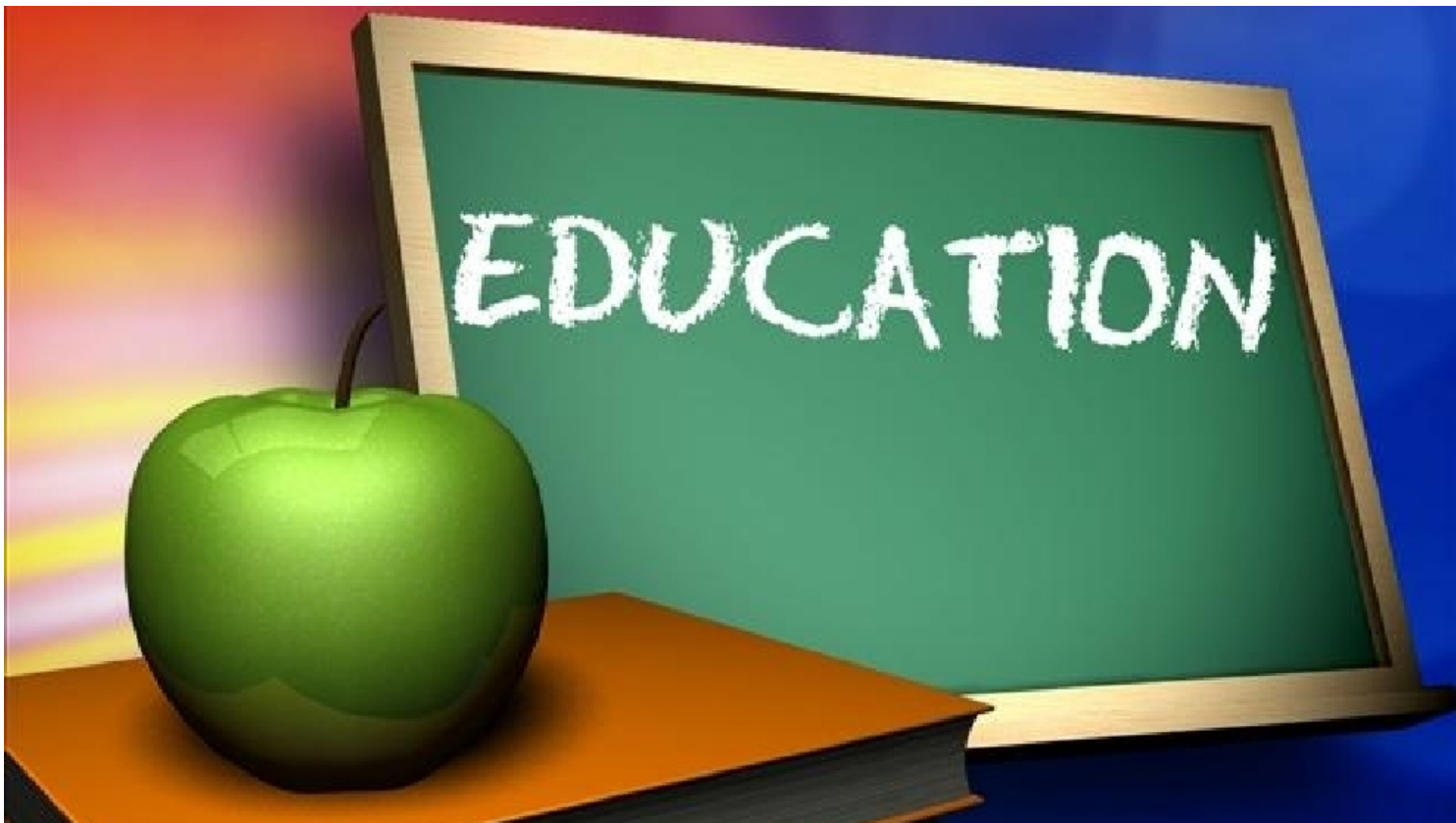
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New survey ranks U.S. students 36th in the world - How do we improve?

by Megan Coleman
Tuesday, December 3rd 2013



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Tue, 03 Dec 2013 18:43:54 GMT —

As the controversy surrounding the Common Core continues, a new survey puts U.S. students far down on the list of the best.

A global education survey released Tuesday shows when it comes to math, reading and science, teens in the U.S. rank 36th in the world. Students in Shanghai are rated the best.

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The results come from an assessment done last year. More than half a million students from 65 countries took a two hour test as part of the

2012 Program for International Student Assessment

(<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/>).

, or PISA. Students in East Asian countries performed the strongest with students in the Chinese city of Shanghai doing the best. Singapore came in second in math, followed by Hong Kong.

The global exam, which was given to 15-year-olds around the world, is considered the worldwide benchmark for education ranking by country. The test measures standards in subjects like math, science and reading across Europe, North and South America, Australia, Asia and parts of the Middle East. This year, Tunisia in Africa also participated.

U.S. performance was extremely low, doing average in reading and science and well below average in math. We failed to reach the top 20 in any of the subjects tested. America fell notably below the United Kingdom and well behind most of our Asian counterparts.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan calls America's performance education stagnation. "The brutal truth...that urgent reality...must serve as a wake up call against educational complacency and low expectations," Duncan said. "The problem is not that our 15-year-

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olds are performing worse today than before...the problem, instead, is that they are simply not making progress. Yet, students in many other nations...are advancing, instead of standing still."

Duncan says average scores in the U.S. are dragged down by a large number of poor minority students. "It is absolutely true that we have large, troubling, deeply unacceptable achievement gaps in America," Duncan said. And these gaps are painfully evident on this PISA assessment."

The results also show that several countries which once lagged behind the U.S. in 2009 are now out-performing American students in areas like science and math.

On a positive note, Duncan says there has been a 50 percent jump in college attendance by Hispanic students and a national bump in math and reading scores among teens. He says innovation, resources and urgency are needed to propel American students to a more competitive level in the global marketplace.

An analyst says one of the reasons that Asia did so well is the push to get quality teachers in the classroom. "Putting strong emphasis on the teaching profession, that is recruiting the best teachers, giving them good working conditions, allowing them to prepare their classes," said Guillermo Montt, an analyst for PISA. "And the fact that they recruit good

teachers comes from the fact that they pay good salaries, the fact that they attract the best

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students from each corporate to the teaching profession. So it is a profession that is valued tremendously in society as a whole, not only among other professionals, but by students, by parents, school principals, system-wide."

Switzerland ranked in the top of the European countries in math and 9th overall in the world. German students ranked above average in all areas.

For the first time, the U.K. failed to make the top 20 in any of the categories and ranked 26th overall. One British teacher says the approach taken in Asia isn't necessarily the best one. "I think we have a different approach to education over here, and I don't think that's a bad thing," said Tom Murphy, a teacher in Great Britain. "The PISA results in 2009 revealed that the Far Eastern pupils didn't on the whole enjoy their school experience. I don't think that's the case here. I think our students enjoy coming to school, they experience a wide range of different lessons every day and I think they like the experience and I think that's a good thing."

What does the U.S. need to do to compete on a global scale and produce the best students? Leave your thoughts below.

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