

PRESS RELEASE
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NCEE Collaborates with OECD on Analysis of Successful Education Systems and their Lessons for the United States

Washington, D.C.—On the same day that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) announced the latest PISA scores that once again reveal U.S. students ranked in the middle of the pack internationally, it also released a new report co-authored by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) that analyzes how nations with consistently high-performing or fast-improving education systems as measured by PISA have achieved strong results.

Commissioned by OECD at the request of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, [“Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States”](#) examines in detail success stories from high-performing nations such as Finland, Singapore, Japan and Canada and other fast-improving education systems such as China and Poland. The final chapter of the volume outlines for policymakers, educators, and media in the U.S. important lessons from these nations that can help inform education reform efforts in this country.

At this morning’s announcement of the PISA scores, OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría officially presented the report to Secretary Duncan, who called its lessons from successful education systems for the U.S. “fascinating reading” and added, “I stayed up half the night reading through it.”

“This report shows that while there is more than one route to reaching the top internationally when it comes to education, the principles that underlie outstanding performance are remarkably similar all over the world. These principles can be used to inform policies and practices here in the U.S.,” said NCEE president Marc Tucker.

Tucker noted that among the commonalities are clear, rigorous standards for what students should know that are closely tied to a curriculum that in turn informs high quality assessments that measure complex, higher-order thinking. These highly aligned instructional systems are used to build systems of gateways for students through the education system, gateways they can only get through by demonstrating that they are qualified to go on to the next step in their education or their career.

The top performing systems ensure that they get high quality teachers by aggressively raising the standards to get into pre-service teacher education programs, concentrating teacher education in major universities, raising teacher pay (U.S. teachers’ pay is very low compared to the top performing countries), providing prospective teachers with the skills they need to diagnose student problems early on and prescribing the appropriate remedies, raising the standards to enter the teaching force, providing new recruits with master teachers who can mentor them, and creating career ladders for master teachers that will enable them to earn at high levels and stay in teaching.

Top performing countries typically have very strong teachers unions, but governments in those countries have found ways to collaborate with those unions in ways that lead to high student performance.

Teachers in many high performing countries often want larger class sizes, not smaller ones, because of the way they organize classroom instruction. Students in those countries who need more help to get to high standards typically get more funding than students from relatively high wealth families. Education policies in the high performing countries are more coherent, and the incentives that affect students, teachers and school administrators are better aligned with the public's goals.

While many Americans believe that other countries get better results because those countries educate only a few, while the United States educates everyone, that turns out not to be true. What is true is that a student's socio-economic background is a better predictor of that student's academic performance in the U.S. than is true in most of the top performing countries.

NCEE will be hosting a conference in January that brings together authors of the country case studies with policymakers, educators and other stakeholders to discuss the report's findings and their implications for federal and state policy in the U.S. For more details about the report or the upcoming conference, contact Dan Kaufman, 202-667-0901, or dan.kaufman@widmeyer.com.

Since 1988, NCEE has been researching the world's best performing education systems to unlock their secrets. We focus on their standards, instructional systems and assessment designs. We look at the way they govern, finance and organize their systems. We use this information to provide groundbreaking designs for high performance education systems at the national, state and local levels. For much better student performance. For all of our students.