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National Center on Education and the Economy President Marc Tucker's Statement on New U.S. Workforce Skills Report (PIAAC)

Marc Tucker, president of the National Center on Education and the Economy, released the following statement on the new report, *Skills of U.S. Unemployed, Young and Older Adults in Sharper Focus: Results from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) 2012/2014*, from the National Center for Education Statistics.

"These new data and analyses give us a more detailed look at the most recent PIAAC survey as well as deeper context for looking at those results. But there is nothing in the new report that would change most observers' reactions to the last report. The picture remains bleak for U.S. workers.

In today's global labor market, companies can choose their workers from among dozens of countries. In this highly competitive environment, American workers are at an enormous disadvantage. First, a smaller proportion of our students graduate high school. Second, even those who do graduate perform poorly relative to their competitors in other countries on the OECD PISA survey of high school students. It should not surprise us that the skills of our graduating high school students predict the skills of our adult workers. The PIAAC data show us what those adult workers know and can do. It is exactly what the high school data predict.

American workers' scores on reading are not statistically different from those of the average for workers in the other countries surveyed, but their scores on mathematics and problem solving are among the lowest in all countries surveyed. We know that the performance of American high school students on the PISA surveys is declining relative to the performance of students in the other PISA countries, so it should not surprise us that nothing in this time series data suggests that young adults in our workforce are not performing any better than our older workers.

What is truly surprising in this data is the fact that American workers score dead last among all the nations surveyed, in "problem-solving in technology-rich environments." This refers to the use of common productivity tools like spreadsheets to perform common workplace tasks. This despite the fact that the U.S. is among the world's largest spenders on education technology for our schools.

It is still the case, and is likely to continue to be the case, unless something changes, that American workers, once the best educated in the world, are now among the least well-educated in the industrialized world. NCEE continues to believe that this is now turning out to be the central fact—the elephant in the room—in the current presidential campaign. We now live in a world in which what you make is—to an unprecedented degree—a function of what you know. If it is indeed true that a growing number of Americans know less than their counterparts and competitors in many other parts of the world, then they are at a crippling competitive disadvantage. That has economic consequences and those economic consequences are now

turning into political consequences. The United States is now just beginning to see those consequences play out in the current presidential race.”

Reporters who would like to schedule an interview with Marc Tucker may contact Brendan Williams-Kief, NCEE’s Director of Communications at 202-905-6284 or by email at bwilliamskief@ncee.org.

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The National Center on Education and the Economy was created in 1988 to analyze the implications of changes in the international economy for American education, formulate an agenda for American education based on that analysis and seek wherever possible to accomplish that agenda through policy change and development of the resources educators would need to carry it out. Follow NCEE on Twitter [@CtrEdEcon](https://twitter.com/CtrEdEcon) and on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ncee).

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