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Leading High-Performance School Systems: Lessons from the World's Best

Based on Five Decades of Research, Marc Tucker Explains in New Book How to Redesign U.S. Schools and Districts So That All Students Can Reach the Highest Global Standards

Washington, D.C. Over the last 40 years, the performance of American high school students has stood still or declined. In those four decades, none of the major reforms that have dominated the education reform agenda seem to have made any difference as students in nearly 30 nations first pulled even and then surpassed the U.S. in achievement, some by very wide margins. Those high-performing countries have produced students who can face the future well equipped to deal with whatever is ahead, while the U.S. has produced a large and growing number of high school graduates who will not have the skills to earn a living in a world remade by relentlessly advancing globalization and intelligent technology. A new book describes the strategies used by the nations that are doing a much better job of educating their students than the U.S. and shows in detail how school superintendents, principals and school boards can adapt and implement those strategies in the American context. The book lays out a comprehensive education reform agenda for the 21st century that is based not on a theory or ideology but the actual performance of nations that have used these strategies to far outpace the U.S., and the system designs they used to get there.

[*Leading High-Performance School Systems: Lessons from the World's Best*](#), published by ASCD, is authored by Marc Tucker, who has been studying the world's top-performing education systems since 1989. In the book, Tucker explains that the U.S. education system is brilliantly designed to meet the needs of the early 1900s, but very poorly adapted to the needs of today's students. He sees recent decades of education reform as an endless search for silver bullet solutions to complex problems that demand instead the design not of new programs but rather new systems of education designed by America's school and school system leaders. *Leading High-Performance School Systems* is a handbook for hands-on superintendents, principals and other school leaders who want to redesign their systems for high performance – for high achievement, for equity and for efficiency – and get much better results not by spending more money but by changing how that money is spent.

“The challenge U.S. education faces today is unprecedented. American educators must figure out how to provide to all a kind and quality of education that educators have provided up to now only to a small elite,” said Tucker. “They will have to raise average academic performance of all students graduating high school two to three grade levels

above the current average while substantially closing the gaps between the top performers and the bottom performers, and they will need to do this for not much more money than schools are spending now. The answer to this challenge is not new programs, but new systems. This book describes how this system building is accomplished and provides ideas to use and ways to string together those ideas into effective systems that will enable schools to match the achievements of top-performers.”

The book provides actionable recommendations for U.S. education leaders around a key set of areas for building a coherent and effective school system that delivers high performance and much greater equity for no more money than we are spending now including:

- How to ensure an abundant supply of excellent teachers
- How to redesign schools as professional workplaces where teachers improve their skills continually
- How to produce greater equity while working at the same time to raise performance
- How to improve leadership training

“The roadmap for this work is here in this book,” writes Linda Darling-Hammond, the world-renowned education researcher and head of the Learning Policy Institute, in her foreword to *Leading High-Performance Systems*. “The book is a magnum opus, a compilation of the best research, thinking, and action of pioneering educators around the world, including Tucker himself...this account will provide readers with a clear set of ideas about what is educationally possible, why it is necessary, and what we should do about it.”

Darling-Hammond describes the book as “Grippingly written, persuasively argued, and vivid in its examples.”

Written with the support of the National Center on Education and the Economy, the organization Tucker led for 30 years, from 1988 to 2018, the book provides an in-depth look at what top performers, including Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) standouts Singapore, Hong Kong, Canada, Finland and New Zealand, are doing to drive success and then translates their best practices into lessons applicable to schools and districts in the U.S.

Reporters interested in speaking with Marc Tucker and connecting with district and school leaders highlighted in the book for their work on elements of this agenda may contact NCEE Communications Officer Julia Banks at jbanks@ncee.org or 202-888-2536.

For more information on NCEE’s international comparative education research, read [*The 9 Building Blocks for a World-Class Education System*](#).

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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. For more information visit www.ncee.org.