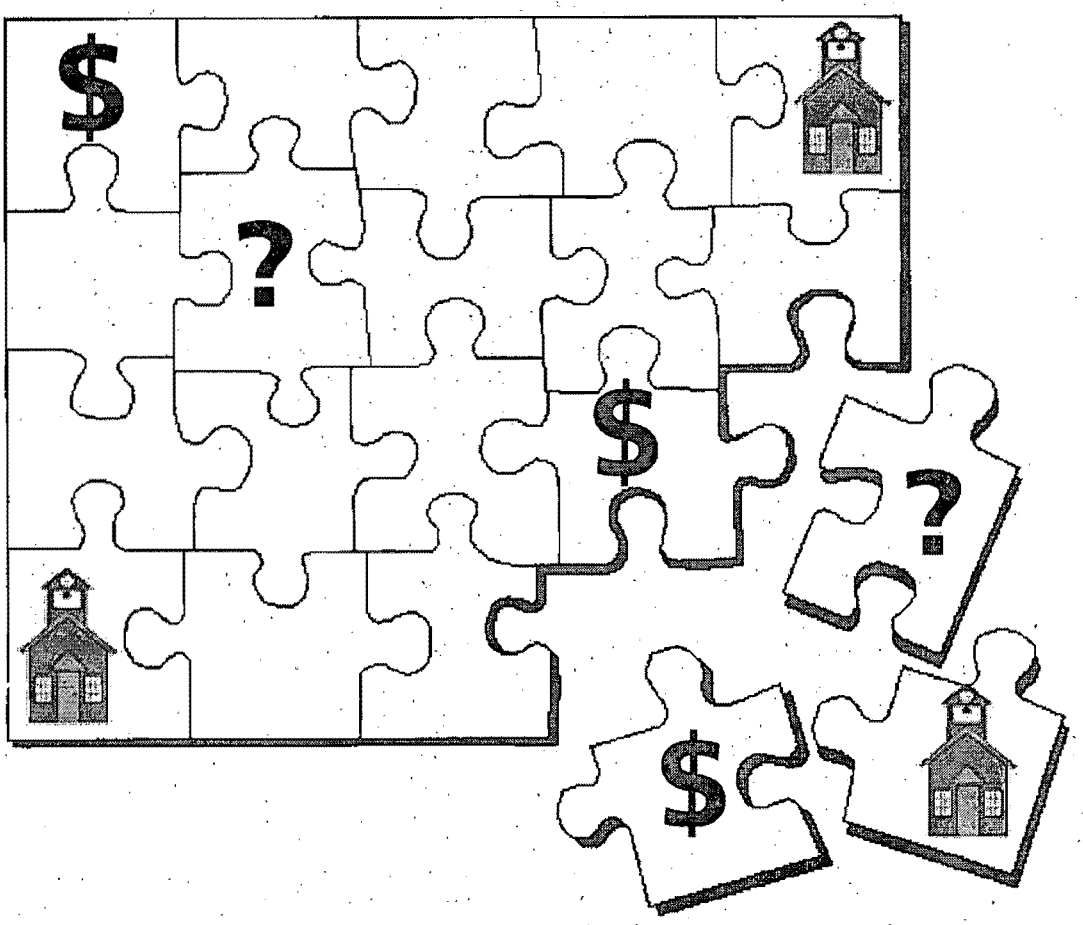
School Finance

How and What Do Schools Spend?



·NSBA·

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School Board Advocacy for Public Education

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Excellence and Equity in Public Education through School Board Leadership

This publication is the third in a series of research efforts being done by NSBA to provide reliable data, information, analysis, and comments on important problems and issues of concern to persons and organizations responsible for making decisions related to American education.

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NSBA Mission Statement: The mission of the National School Boards Association, working with and through all its Federation Members, is to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership.

NSBA Vision for Public Education: The National School Boards Association believes local school boards are the nation's preeminent expression of grass roots democracy and this form of governance of the public schools is fundamental to the continued success of public education. Adequately funded, student-centered public schools will provide, in a safe and supportive environment, a comprehensive education for the whole child and will prepare all of America's children for a lifetime of learning in a diverse, democratic society and an interdependent global economy. America's school boards, by creating a vision of excellence and equity for every child, will provide performance-oriented schools that meet today's problems as well as the challenges of tomorrow.

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Foreword

The National School Boards Association (NSBA), in conjunction with the nation's state school boards associations and other NSBA Federation active members, is engaged in a broad-based effort to build support for public education — and celebrate its successes. This effort is the result of concern in recent years that public confidence in the performance of the nation's public schools is being undermined by inaccurate information.

The time has come for a concerted advocacy campaign by local school board members in their communities as well as state school boards associations in their state capitals. The goal of this ongoing effort is to make clear to the public that their public schools are succeeding and accurately describe where progress still needs to be made. Consequently, NSBA is providing information — issue analysis and ideas — for use in the advocacy effort on behalf of the public schools across the United States.

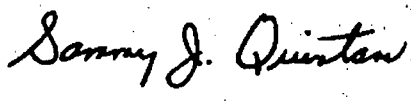
Myth: Public schools spend too much money supporting a bloated bureaucracy, and too little money makes it to the classroom. Reality: Very little money goes to administration, and increased spending in fact leads to increased student achievement.

This report is the third in a series of reports designed to synthesize and highlight the research findings in areas of interest to school board members and others working in public education. It is our hope that you will be able to use this information to promote the successes of public education in your community, as well as to contest the myths concerning school district expenditure patterns.

Towards that end, this report focuses specifically on school budgets, the relationship between expenditures and student achievement, and an analysis of school district spending. Future reports will focus on correcting other publicly held inaccuracies relating to such areas as comparisons with private education and comparisons with other nations. This effort is being conducted by NSBA's Advocacy Office, headed by Michael A. Resnick, Senior Associate Executive Director. Karen Anderson, Director of Advocacy Research, authored this report and may be reached at (703) 838-6704.

We hope that you find this information useful as you launch your advocacy efforts at the state and local levels. We appreciate your commitment and dedication to public education and America's public school children.

Sincerely,



Sammy J. Quintana
President

Thomas A. Shannon
Executive Director

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Introduction

How often have you heard that schools spend too much on administrative overhead and too little on actual classroom instruction? How frequently have you heard arguments against increasing spending on public education because it doesn't raise test scores?

Unfortunately, these myths regarding spending are widespread and pervasive. These myths are also quite damaging to the public's confidence in our schools.

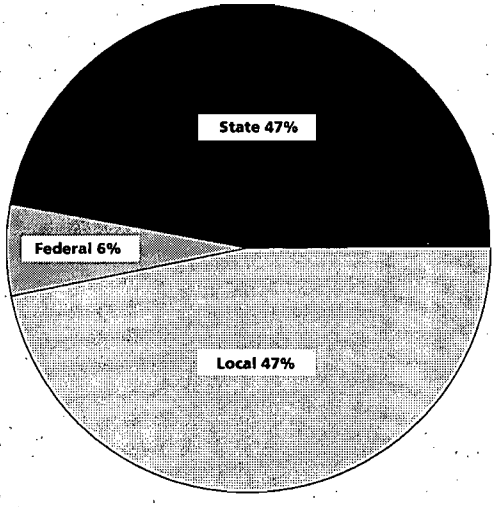
Additionally, critics of public education are almost never held accountable for the figures that they use in their analyses — when they assert that too little of the school budget is spent on instruction, are they looking only at teacher salaries and textbooks? The public never knows.

In this report, we will look closely at the data regarding these myths, and show you how to address them. We will also look at the realities suggested by the numbers. We want to give you the tools to help you conclude — as we have — that these myths are just that: Myths, with no basis in reality and no support from the research. Then you can use this information to show your community the truth about the public schools.

School Budgets: Where Does the Money Come From?

In the United States, we spend almost $300 billion a year on K-12 public education (estimates based on 1993-94 figures). These funds are used to educate over 42 million children, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and are used to employ more than 4.6 million school system staff, including 2.4 million teachers and 400,000 additional instructional staff (Digest of Education Statistics, 1994).

Share of School District Revenue



NCES also reports that per-pupil expenditures, which averaged about $5,721 per pupil in 1993-94, have increased at a rate greater than inflation. However, using this inflation factor has led to a number of exaggerated claims about overspending by public schools; this issue will be examined later in this report.

Since the 1950s, there has been a shift in the source of school funds. Today, the greatest share of school district revenue comes from the state government (around 47%) and from local sources (also about 47%). Slightly more than 6% comes from the federal government. Over time and until recently, the level of funding from the local level has declined while the state's contribution has increased. Most economists trace this development back to property tax reform efforts such as Proposition 13 in California in the late 1970s. There is some evidence, however, that during the 1990s a shift back towards increased local spending has occurred (see Odden, Monk, Nakib, and Picus, 1995 for more information). See Table 1 for state-by-state information.

It is important to note, however, that the figures cited above are national averages — and that there are large disparities in per pupil spending both across and within states. For example, an analysis by Picus (1993) demonstrated that spending tends to be higher in suburban areas surrounding large cities — and that these suburban school districts spend more than the cities they surround. Spending also tends to be highest in the smallest school districts. According to researchers David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, in the late 1980s per pupil expenditures in the U.S. ranged from a low of $2,000 to a high of more than $11,000 (see Table 2 for more information).

School Budgets: Myths

Myth: The Bureaucratic Blob

Perhaps the most pervasive myth about school spending is what former secretary of education William J. Bennett calls the "bureaucratic blob." Schools are, according to Mr. Bennett and others, spending an increasingly large portion of their budgets on administrative costs (and by extension, to hire and support a rising number of school administrators). This myth is believed to be particularly pernicious in urban districts. For example, an April 1994 article in the *Boston Globe* stated that "in the Boston system, 40 percent of the budget never gets to the classroom; it is absorbed by the school department bureaucracy."

Is this true? According to Odden and his colleagues, the numbers do *not* support this theory. Analyses by the Center for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) indicate that schools spend less than 10% of their budgets on district-level administrative expenditures. In fact, Berliner and Biddle (1995) estimate that central office personnel and school site supervisors account only for a total of 4.5% of the total staffing costs in public education.

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In an analysis considering the supervisor to employee ratio in various sectors of the economy, elementary and secondary schools had the greatest number of workers per supervisor. As Berliner and Biddle put it, "most *private* sectors of the economy are

afflicted with far more bureaucracy than is *public* education" (p. 80, emphasis theirs). See Figure 1 for more information.

Data reported by NCES shows that the number of school district administrators and principals has remained constant since 1950. Although school district consolidation has reduced the number of superintendents, additional administrative staff have been hired to meet the growing responsibilities that public schools are expected to meet. Thus, our public schools are meeting a greater number of needs without a corresponding expansion of staff.

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Yet another difficulty with the "bureaucratic blob" myth is that school systems typically do not organize their budgets by program function, frequently classifying certain instruction-related costs as administration. Further, what one district classifies as an administrative cost, another district could classify in an entirely different way — making true comparisons difficult. For example, where does the salary of the transportation staff fit? What about the food services staff? Or school safety staff? Where are teacher and staff pensions accounted for in the budget? Critics frequently will categorize these activities as general administration, when, from a customer standpoint, they are actually providing direct services to students. To be sure, school systems have their share of "bean counters" and report writers, but to what extent are they there to meet the financial and legal accountability demanded by taxpayers or to meet the mandates imposed by state and federal governments?

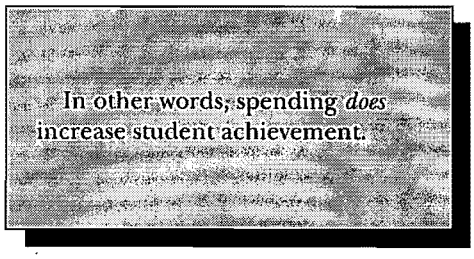
Finally, CPRE also found that urban schools spent even *less* on administration than the average for their respective states. In short, the preponderance of evidence demonstrates that there is *not* an administrative blob in public school systems.

Myth: There is No Link Between Expenditures and Student Achievement

Yet another myth about school spending is that increases in spending are not linked to increases in student achievement — in other words, the money the public spends on education does not lead to higher test scores. This argument, put forth by Eric Hanushek and others, states that although per-pupil expenditures have increased over time, student achievement has not risen accordingly.

A similar view is espoused by groups such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). In 1993 and again in 1994 and 1995, in collaboration with William J. Bennett, ALEC released a document outlining a state by state analysis of the link between per-pupil spending and SAT scores. Not surprisingly, given their political agenda to redirect public support to private education, the authors concluded that states that spend more on public education do not necessarily have the highest SAT scores. For example, New Jersey has one of the highest per-pupil expenditure rates in the nation, yet ranks only 39th in terms of average SAT scores.

Unfortunately, these analyses don't look at *how* the money is spent and how much actually gets to the classroom. In fact, other data suggest that it is a far more positive relationship than that suggested by Hanushek and Bennett.



In response to the work of Dr. Hanushek, education researchers Hedges, Laine & Greenwald reviewed several hundred previous studies looking at the relationship between spending and student achievement. They found a consistent and positive relationship — in other words, spending *does* increase student achievement. In particular, there is a strong link between student achievement and both per-pupil expenditures and teacher experience.

The next few paragraphs in this report will demonstrate that when SAT exam scores are properly analyzed, there *is* a strong relationship between statewide test scores and state per-pupil expenditures. Likewise, both ACT scores and NAEP scores are positively related to state expenditures for public education.

The ALEC study is flawed in several ways. As outlined in NSBA's earlier report *Trends in Student Achievement*, the SAT exam is an inappropriate measure of student achievement to begin with, as it was designed to predict an individual student's performance in his or her first year of college rather than as a measure of general student achievement. Additionally, those states with the *lowest* average SAT scores also have the *greatest numbers* of students who take the SAT exam each year. As an example, in the 1994-95 academic year, the state of Mississippi had a per-pupil expenditure rate of only $3,697, but had an average SAT score of 1,038. However, *only 4% of the student body took the SAT in Mississippi* (i.e., the best students). In contrast, Connecticut SAT takers scored only 908 in 1995, even with an overall expenditure rate of $8,604 — but *81% of the student body in Connecticut took the SAT exam.* When a state has a high number of students taking the SAT, it follows that more of their test takers will be from the bottom tiers of their graduating class. This is true of the nation as a whole, as the number of annual test takers has increased from 10,000 students to over 1 million taking the exam each year.

Finally, their analysis depends upon a *rank ordering* of the states, which forces the reader to use a "horse race" model of looking at the numbers. For the purposes of measuring student performance, the actual point spread between many states makes no difference and they may not be significantly different from each other. In other words, relying upon rankings obscures important aspects of any state-by-state comparisons.

For all these reasons, the conclusion that there is no relationship between school spending and student achievement should be resoundingly rejected. Particularly when looking at school district test scores, these comparisons do not take into account other underlying factors that erode student achievement and place pressure on school districts to spend money they didn't have to spend before (e.g., increases in special populations, the rise of drugs and violence in communities, the impact of "latchkey" families, rising numbers of single parent families, and so on).

A recent analysis of the link between per-pupil expenditures and SAT exam scores published in the *Harvard Educational Review* also found that traditional analyses of this link are flawed in other ways and thus wrongfully conclude the lack of a relationship between spending and achievement. For example, the typical analysis looks at expenditures and SAT scores for the *same* year, without taking prior years of schooling (and hence expenditures) into account. A more realistic analysis involves looking at the relationship between current SAT scores and expenditures from previous years (Powell & Steelman, 1996) because it is those *previous* years of schooling that supported the learning of the *current* SAT test takers.

Contrary to what the critics say, Powell & Steelman *do* find that SAT scores and expenditures rise together, as long as underlying variables such as class ranking and participation rates are taken into account. (Likewise, for ACT exam scores, spending and ACT scores were positively related, independent of the participation rate and class rank variables).

Finally, researcher Howard Wainer (1993) reports a positive relationship between per-pupil expenditures and state National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam scores. In NSBA's earlier report *Trends in Student Achievement*, we showed that NAEP scores are, in reality, a much better measure of student outcomes than the SAT or ACT.

It should be apparent by now that based upon a large number of studies, there *is* a positive relationship between public school spending and increased student achievement.

Other Perspectives on the Relationship of Spending and Student Achievement

In 1994 an influential study by RAND looked at the relationship of student achievement to both per-pupil expenditures and changes in family demographics. In their review of the data, they show substantial improvements in student achievement as measured by NAEP test scores, particularly for minority students. In other words, the gap between white students and minority students has been steadily narrowing, and this is due to a rise in the achievement levels of minority students. What caused this rise in test scores, particularly for black students? The authors of this study argue that increases in funding for public education programs, particularly those that target at-risk students, have led to these improvements in student outcomes.

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Once again, this supports the conclusion that there is a link between per-pupil expenditures and student achievement.

What *Is* the Money Spent On?

If we know, then, that schools are not overspending in the administrative category, what *are* they spending their money on? A review of research in this area conducted by CPRE indicates that about 60% of all spending goes towards instructional services — direct classroom instruction for students in the core academic content areas (Odden et. al, 1995). This 60% figure also includes special education costs. The other 40% includes instructional support, which accounts for an additional 8-10%, and physical maintenance, which accounts for another 9-11%. Other categories of spending include 4-6% transportation and food services, and 9-11% for administration. Several of these categories support instructional services (e.g., physical maintenance or other direct student needs such as transportation).

About 60% of all spending goes towards instructional services — direct classroom instruction for students in the core academic content areas

Other research indicates even higher levels of spending for direct instruction. A 1995 study of education spending over the period between 1967 and 1991 for nine school districts conducted by the Economic Policy Institute supports the finding that about 60% of public school spending is spent on what they call "normal academic functions." Included in this category is teacher compensation, which accounts for about 2/3 of the costs of "regular education."

Not included in this category in their nine district study is special education spending, which has increased to a rate of about 17% of all education expenditures. In fact, special education costs account for about 38% of all new money spent in the schools. (Other expenditures of "new money" will be discussed later in this report.)

The Finance Analysis Model

Earlier in this report, we spoke of functional budgeting. Unfortunately, at the local district or school level, officials themselves are often not entirely sure just how their education dollars are being spent. For example, although school district financial officers can calculate such figures as per-pupil costs for that district, they typically do not break out costs for individual schools. In other words, how much money actually gets to the classroom? And where does the rest of the money go? In order to answer these questions, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Center for Workforce Preparation and the Coopers & Lybrand accounting firm joined together to create a school finance software package.

The Finance Analysis Model software organizes school district expenditures along three basic dimensions (functional, program, and grade level). The *functional* dimension tracks expenditures into five separate categories:

- Instruction, which includes teachers, paraprofessionals, classroom materials, and technology;

- Instructional Support, which includes curriculum development, library costs, and so on;
- Operations, which includes transportation, food service, utilities and maintenance costs;
- Leadership, which includes the school board, principals, and so on; and
- Other Commitments, which includes retiree benefits, principal and interest, reserves, and so on.

The *program* dimension tracks the costs of specific educational programs such as bilingual education, special education, and so on. Finally, the *grade level* dimension allows for comparisons of spending at elementary vs. middle vs. high schools.

In this way, school personnel and community leaders can look at *where* expenditures are currently occurring, and make any changes needed in order to increase student achievement. This model also suggests a uniform way of categorizing various expenditures — for example, the model places transportation, food service, and school safety staffing expenses into the Operations function category. (For further information about this software, contact Larry Maloney at the Center for Workforce Preparation at 202-463-5730). Additionally, South Carolina has become the first state to provide financial data about public education in this format. (For more information, contact Gary Glenn, executive assistant for internal and district auditing, South Carolina Department of Education, at 803-734-8787).

Has Spending Gone Up or Down?

In the ongoing battle over public school spending, one side believes that spending has increased dramatically, with no accompanying rise in student achievement. The other side believes that spending needs to continue to increase because schools are facing immense problems in educating an increasingly diverse student population.

What has happened to school spending over time? The available evidence supports the conclusion that the total amount of funding for public education has increased fairly dramatically over the past several decades. NCES estimates that after adjusting for inflation, spending has increased by about 26% since the 1983-84 school year, with virtually all of that increase occurring during the 1980s (see Figure 2). Therefore, when spending comparisons are made between the 1970s and the 1990s, current spending levels in this decade end up carrying the baggage of the increases of the 1980s. Moreover, the NCES study does not examine the underlying factors contributing to the rise of education costs.

After adjusting for inflation, spending has increased by about 26% since the 1983-84 school year, with virtually all of that increase occurring during the 1980s.

The EPI study buttresses that conclusion and further reports an increase of about 60% in real per pupil spending, again after adjusting for inflation, during the period between

1967 and 1991. Only about 28% of that increase, however, has gone to support regular education costs; this is an increase in real spending of only about 1% per year during that time period.

The issue of adjusting for inflation is a crucial one. Traditional adjustments for economic inflation (for example, the Consumer Price Index) do not apply to public schools in the same way they apply to businesses. For example, schools must take into account the changing composition of the workforce in a highly labor intensive setting, the impact of mandates from state and federal governments, serving the special needs of more students, and so on. (The EPI study, in fact, proposed an alternative inflation index that attempts to account more accurately for the inflation experienced by public school systems).

It is important to note, however, that these figures are national averages — there are still large disparities both between and within states in terms of education spending. These disparities have led to a number of state level school finance litigation cases in the past several years and will likely continue to be a source of contention.

Where Have Increases in Spending Occurred?

Given these large increases in spending, where has the "new" money gone? In other words, in which categories have the increases in spending primarily occurred? According to Odden and his colleagues, most of the funds have gone to hire more teachers and thereby lower class size. Research conducted in and funded by the state of Tennessee indicates that reducing class size by hiring additional teachers leads to improved student learning, particularly for minority students (Mosteller, 1995).

Other uses of increased funding for education include the provision of out-of-classroom instructional services, expanding special education costs, and increased teacher salaries.

Other uses of increased funding for education include the provision of out-of-classroom instructional services, expanding special education costs, and increased teacher salaries. (Note that these funds are *not* being used to support rising school administrative costs). Richard Rothstein also notes that school nutrition programs have benefited from new money. Increased transportation costs and costs associated with keeping students in school — thereby lowering school dropout rates (see our earlier report, *School Completion Rates: A Public School Success Story*) — also account for a portion of new education spending. This investment of resources in serving a growing population of at-risk students has led to an overall school completion rate of 86% of 22-year-olds completing high school or its equivalency. This is particularly impressive when contrasted with school completion figures from the 1950s: In 1950, only 34% of the population completed 4 years of high school. Ultimately, the long-term economic value of keeping students in school far outweighs the additional short-term costs. Additionally, there is a strong positive relationship between years of schooling and annual income.

Several high-profile analyses of school district spending have received a great deal of media attention in recent months. The first, an analysis of spending in the New York City public schools, utilized an earlier version of the Finance Analysis Model described above (see Speakman, Cooper, Samipieri, May, Holsomback, and Glass, 1996). Probably the most striking finding from this complex analysis was the level of expenditure for special education and special education-related services, for a total cost of more than $2 billion (of a total budget of $8.05 billion for 1994).

The EPI examination of the spending patterns in nine public school systems in 1991 concluded that although spending for "regular education" has declined as a share of total per pupil spending, special education costs have increased since 1967. Spending for teacher salaries also increased, due largely to the fact that teachers in 1991 have both higher levels of education and a greater level of experience than did teachers in 1967. Additionally, emerging career options for women and a general improvement in benefit programs throughout the economy have probably also contributed to higher teacher salaries.

Myth: The U.S. Spends Far More on Education than Other Nations

Critics of public education like to point out that the U.S. spends substantially more for public education than do our international counterparts. However, this research often uses figures that include expenditures for *higher* education — which, in the U.S., is greater than the amount spent by many other nations (see Table 3). Further, if students from other countries attend U.S. universities to receive a superior education, and if U.S. universities are predominantly attended by U.S. students, it follows that U.S. students are academically able to support and compete in the best universities in the world. In 1992, "nonresident alien" students made up 3.2% of the total enrollment at colleges and universities, up from 2% in 1976.

The U.S. ranks sixth in expenditures — not first, as the critics like to believe.

Leaving aside the issue of higher education, how much *does* the U.S. invest in public education as compared to other nations? According to NCES, 1988 figures show that for preprimary - secondary education, the U.S. spends more than Canada, West Germany, Japan, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom, but less that Sweden, Switzerland, and Denmark, among others (see Tables 3 and 4). Table 3, in fact, indicates that the U.S. ranks sixth in expenditures — not first, as the critics like to believe.

When considering the proportion of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) that is spent on public education, the U.S. spends about 5% of GDP. This is higher than that spent on education in Japan, but is similar to figures in France, Italy and the United Kingdom (see Table 4). Again, it should be noted that the U.S. ranks tenth, not first, in overall percentages of GDP spent on public education. Again, the critics are wrong.

As discussed in NSBA's earlier report *Trends in Student Achievement*, care must be taken in making international comparisons. For example, do the European figures take into account the same kinds of mandates that American schools must deal with, such as asbestos abatement, special education, civil rights policies, pensions, and so on? What about the role of private funding in public education? Do other nations rely upon similar budgeting and accounting systems?

Berliner and Biddle also emphasize the fact that many European nations attempt to equalize funding across their nations, while spending for U.S. schools varies dramatically by region of the country (this point will be discussed later in this report). Thus, relying upon average per-pupil expenditure rates may mask important within-nation differences.

Many European nations attempt to equalize funding across their nations, while spending for U.S. schools varies dramatically by region of the country. Thus, relying upon average per-pupil expenditure rates may mask important within-nation differences.

In short, there is *no* evidence that in the United States we spend substantially more on public education than do other nations. In fact, as noted by Berliner and Biddle, other nations actually spend "a *greater* percentage of their per capita income on primary and secondary education" (p. 68, emphasis theirs) than the United States does.

Urban - Rural - Suburban Differences

Earlier in this report, we suggested that the data show that urban districts spend less on administrative costs than the average costs for their home state. For example, the largest urban districts in the state of Florida, California and New York all spend less than the statewide average for that state.

Are there other differences in spending by type of district? Data from the EPI study described earlier indicates that the growth of spending for "regular" education was greater for suburban districts than for urban districts. In fact, the authors report that regular per pupil spending in the urban schools barely grew at all.

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Clearly, urban schools, with their highest concentration of children living in poverty and other populations of at-risk students, are likely to spend their education dollars in different ways. It is likely that their special education, security, and social service costs consume a larger share of the urban school district budget when compared to suburban and rural districts. Facilities (repair and replacement) are also a major expense for urban districts, as is technology.

Urban districts are also typically large. According to NCES, large districts have lower per-pupil expenditures and higher student/teacher ratios.

In terms of actual level of expenditures, there is virtually no difference between urban schools and suburban schools. When measuring actual dollars, both urban and suburban schools spend more than rural schools; however, when actual dollars are adjusted for regional costs and student needs, rural districts actually spend slightly more ($4,408) than suburban ($4,189) or urban ($4,218) districts.

It should be noted that rural districts may have higher transportation costs as well as higher technology costs than either urban or suburban schools. Suburban schools are also serving a higher number of at-risk students than in previous decades.

Regional Differences

According to NCES, the largest variations in terms of public education spending occur between regions of the country. The northeast spends the most ($5,293), followed by the Midwest ($4,383) and the south ($4,047). The west spends the least ($3,632). At least some of this differential can be explained by regional differences in "buying power" for the education dollar.

The largest variations in terms of public education spending occur between regions of the country.

Summary

- Average per-pupil expenditures in the U.S. are about $5,721 (1993-94 figures). There are large disparities, however, in spending both across and within individual states. Public education spending has increased at a rate greater than the rate of inflation.

- There is no evidence that schools spend too much on administrative costs. In fact, when compared to other types of workplaces, public school systems hire far fewer supervisors.

- Higher levels of per-pupil spending do in fact lead to increases in student achievement, as measured by a number of different tests such as the SAT, ACT and NAEP exams.

- Most of the money spent by public schools goes toward direct instruction. Most of the money spent on direct instruction, in turn, is spent on teacher salaries.

- Special education costs account for 38 cents out of every "new" education dollar.

- Although education spending has risen over the past couple of decades, that "new" money has gone primarily to support teacher salaries and special education costs — not to support an expanding public school bureaucracy.

- Teacher costs have risen to support lower student-teacher ratios, more highly educated teachers, and changes in the labor market (e.g., more career options for women).

- The U.S. spends more than some nations on public schools, and less than others. There is no evidence that we spend an exorbitant amount on education, with the possible exception of higher education, when compared to other nations.

- Most increases in spending for "regular" education have occurred in suburban schools, and spending is higher overall in the northeastern states.

How You Can Use This Information

1. **Develop a "pie chart" for your district** that identifies expenses for student services staff such as bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and curriculum specialists, etc. Similarly, show the amount of funds spent on capital expenditures, utilities, etc. that may appear as a central administration cost in your school district budget. Spell out the costs associated with your major state and local mandates.

2. **Create a "functional budget" for your district**, to help the public understand the basic categories of school spending.

3. **Develop a chart showing "real" expenditure rates** after adjusting for inflation, and show how "new" dollars are distributed among the general education programs, special education, other student services, and general administration.

4. **Choose a baseline for comparison with your district's current budget that shows what you want it to show.** Critics like to choose their baseline of comparison to make the schools look as bad as possible, even if these bases are totally erroneous. What do the trends look like over time in your district? Take a look at them, and choose a baseline year for comparison that presents an accurate picture, rather than the worst case comparison.

5. **Develop brief job descriptions of functions that are classified as administration,** but show which are service oriented (e.g., bus drivers, principals, special education personnel) and which are primarily managerial (accounting staff, personnel directors, associate superintendents, etc.). In the case of grant writers and administrators, show how these positions are effective in attracting and sustaining revenue (e.g. by applying for and receiving federal funding), rather than being additional costs for the school system.

6. **Keep track of the expenditures/revenue sources of other school districts** in your area and in your state. That way, you can compare your own budget to that of others, as well as to state averages.

7. **Look at socioeconomic and demographic trends in your community,** and consider how any changes (such as increases in poverty rates) are affecting your district's budgetary decisions to spend additional dollars.

8. **Be proactive with the media.** Schedule meetings with local education writers, editorial boards, radio stations, and so on to outline your district's budget priorities, and to share information about your district's overall budget. Don't wait until the media comes to you!

9. **Be responsive to the media.** If the local press prints a negative story about your district's budget, make sure to answer those charges in a responsible, nondefensive way using figures from this report (along with local numbers). See Appendix A for sample letter to the editor.

10. **Create a "community advisory group"** of parents, teachers, business leaders, and other interested parties to work with your board and offer suggestions on how to best share budget and expenditure information with the media and the public.

11. **Show how your schools are an integral part of the community.** Are school facilities used by other groups during non-school hours? Are students involved in public service projects with local charities? This may help justify your district's budget priorities.

12. **Hold town meetings to share budget and expenditure information.** Have charts and tables available as handouts to share with all who attend. Be sure to schedule these meetings at the appropriate points in your district's budget cycle.

13. **Make presentations to other community groups,** such as business groups, church groups, and so on. Share how the money is spent in your district.

14. **Separate out concerns about revenues and taxes from what are being portrayed as school spending issues.** The results of changes in methods of property assessment or grants of commercial tax abatements and rollbacks may be fueling citizen dissatisfaction—and this may be confused with school expenditures. Similarly, reductions in a state's commitment to public education funding may be misconstrued by voters as an increase in school spending, when local property taxes must rise to offset state revenue shortfalls.

15. **Keep this report handy!** Use the information in this report to help respond to questions from the community and the media. All too often schools are unfairly and erroneously painted in a negative light and successes are diminished: The information in this report can help you present a more accurate picture of school district expenditures.

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Appendix A

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

School Spending in Fairfax County

Now let's get this straight ["Fairfax School Spending is Criticized," Metro, March 17]. In recent years, Fairfax County has seen a huge influx of non-English-speaking immigrants from every corner of the world. The school system has responded with smaller class sizes, more individualized instruction and a model English-as-a-Second-Language program that graduates children into mainstream classrooms full-time within two years.

Meanwhile, SAT scores in Fairfax County have gone up from 60 points above the national average in 1980 to 80 points above the national average today.

So how can critics tell us that this proves the system isn't working? How can anti-tax activist Dorothy Tella of the Fairfax Taxpayers Alliance claim taxpayers aren't getting "value for their money." What does she value?

Our son Jake is a fifth-grader at Weyanoke (the school featured in the story). It's an inspiring place, where immense challenges are faced with phenomenal spirit and competence. Weyanoke works. To keep it working, those of us lucky enough to own homes will have to pay a little more in taxes. Rather than complaining, we should count our blessings.

NANCY and ROBERT McINTYRE
Alexandria

Letters to the Editor, *The Washington Post,* March 30, 1996

Table 1

Revenues for Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Source and State: 1991-1992

[Amounts in thousands of dollars]

State or other area	Total	Federal		State		Local and Intermediate		Private	
		Amount	Percent of total	Amount	Percent of total	Amount	Percent of total	Amount	Percent of total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
United States	**$234,485,729**	**$15,493,330**	**6.6**	**$108,792,779**	**46.4**	**$103,975,705**	**44.3**	**$6,223, 916**	**2.7**
Alabama	2,823,340	322,576	11.4	1,659,018	58.8	611,248	21.6	230,497	8.2
Alaska	1,120,970	128,612	11.5	762,663	68.0	205,165	18.3	24,530	2.2
Arizona	3,226,760	284,615	8.8	1,366,934	42.4	1,510,219	46.8	64,992	2.0
Arkansas	1,828,439	197,915	10.8	1,095,488	59.9	478,138	26.2	56,899	3.1
California	26,868,216	2,027,474	7.5	17,696,851	65.9	6,830,548	25.4	313,344	1.2
Colorado	3,058,633	152,090	5.0	1,307,982	42.8	1,510,328	49.4	88,233	2.9
Connecticut	3,891,217	126,225	3.2	1,583,668	40.7	2,063,543	53.0	117,781	3.0
Delaware	608,015	46,144	7.6	400,819	65.9	150,409	24.7	10,643	1.8
District of Columbia	711,172	66,508	9.4	—	—	641,350	90.2	3,314	0.5
Florida	10,810,522	788,420	7.3	5,227,256	48.4	4,350,167	40.2	444,679	4.1
Georgia	5,332,428	409,741	7.7	2,545,306	47.7	2,255,693	42.3	121,687	2.3
Hawai	1,000,848	75,310	7.5	903,444	90.3	4,893	0.5	17,201	1.7
Idaho	861,955	69,859	8.1	532,475	61.8	242,120	28.1	17,501	2.0
Illinois	9,959,661	680,351	6.8	2,881,367	28.9	6,177,317	62.0	220,627	2.2
Indiana	5,127,888	272,355	5.3	2,710,144	52.9	1,975,429	38.5	169,960	3.3
Iowa	2,486,610	132,718	5.3	1,176,197	47.3	1,025,899	41.3	151,796	6.1
Kansas	2,264,365	123,564	5.5	959,173	42.4	1,112,810	49.1	68,817	3.0
Kentucky	2,939,351	296,573	10.1	1,969,899	67.0	651,896	22.2	20,984	0.7
Louisiana	3,377,064	363,958	10.8	1,848,734	54.7	1,068,290	31.6	96,982	2.8
Maine	1,246,798	73,876	5.9	621,026	49.8	548,461	44.0	3,435	0.3
Maryland	4,692,155	238,573	5.1	1,792,755	38.2	2,511,988	53.5	148,839	3.2
Massachusetts	5,621,629	296,702	5.3	1,728,360	30.7	3,483,002	62.0	113,565	2.0
Michigan	9,659,095	599,076	6.2	2,566,851	26.6	6,289,097	65.1	204,071	2.1
Minnesota	4,512,902	200,853	4.5	2,327,594	51.6	1,817,120	40.3	167,335	3.7
Mississippi	1,701,274	289,392	17.0	910,068	53.5	436,000	25.6	65,904	3.9
Missouri	4,053,529	258,032	6.4	1,538,752	38.0	2,088,076	51.5	168,668	4.2
Montana	821,111	72,483	8.8	343,293	41.8	373,016	45.4	32,318	3.9
Nebraska	1,506,050	93,705	6.2	517,098	34.3	761,716	50.6	133,530	8.9
Nevada	1,122,853	46,957	4.2	434,762	38.7	601,857	53.6	39,277	3.5
New Hampshire	1,015,187	31,098	3.1	86,597	8.5	871,238	85.8	26,253	2.6
New Jersey	10,523,002	436,024	4.1	4,438,939	42.2	5,451,200	51.8	196,838	1.9
New Mexico	1,368,013	169,616	12.4	1,009,593	73.8	154,408	11.3	34,395	2.5
New York	21,573,865	1,210,481	5.6	8,696,709	40.3	11,447,389	53.1	219,286	1.0
North Carolina	5,067,118	364,253	7.2	3,274,259	64.6	1,218,261	24.0	210,345	4.2
North Dakota	539,184	59,909	11.1	241,401	44.8	207,434	38.5	30,439	5.6
Ohio	9.736,287	571,416	5.9	3,974,682	40.8	4,797,389	49.3	392,800	4.0
Oklahoma	2,541,025	117,060	4.6	1,580,811	62.2	749,822	29.5	93,332	3.7
Oregon	2,869,231	183,784	6.4	877,897	30.6	1,722,487	60.0	85,063	3.0
Pennsylvania	11,561,337	664,767	5.7	4,788,825	41.4	5,874,822	50.8	232,923	2.0
Rhode Island	896,056	53,653	6.0	344,820	38.5	486,720	54.3	10,863	1.2
South Carolina	2,914,730	262,740	9.0	1,409,019	48.3	1,119,150	38.4	123,822	4.2
South Dakota	559,944	61,986	11.1	151,173	27.0	327,868	58.6	18,918	3.4
Tennessee	3,093,743	324,252	10.5	1,305,270	42.2	1,225,443	39.6	238,778	7.7
Texas	16,891,646	1,120,400	6.6	7,326,385	43.4	7,975,106	47.2	469,755	2.8
Utah	1,527,561	106,069	6.9	874,332	57.2	493,354	32.3	53,807	3.5
Vermont	645,751	32,761	5.1	204,369	31.6	395,643	61.3	12,978	2.0
Virginia	5,560,451	322,156	5.8	1,729,400	31.1	3,340,445	60.1	168,450	3.0
Washington	5,086,074	288,382	5.7	3,644,053	71.6	998,770	19.6	154,868	3.0
West Virginia	1,715,747	129,763	7.6	1,153,764	67.2	406,703	23.7	25,517	1.5
Wisconsin	4,966,200	216,430	4.4	1,958,288	39.4	2,693,730	54.2	97,752	2.0
Wyoming	598,728	31,762	5.3	314,216	52.5	242,527	40.5	10,222	1.7
Outlying areas									
American Samoa	34,234	22,648	66.2	11,423	33.4	—	—	163	0.5
Guam	164,582	16,958	10.3	—	—	145,142	88.2	2,482	1.5
Northern Marianas	41,046	9,314	22.7	31,391	76.5	340	0.8	0	—
Puerto Rico	1,371,616	443,759	32.4	927,114	67.6	327	—	416	—
Virgin Islands	158,004	41,429	26.2	—	—	116,505	73.7	69	—

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey.

Table 2

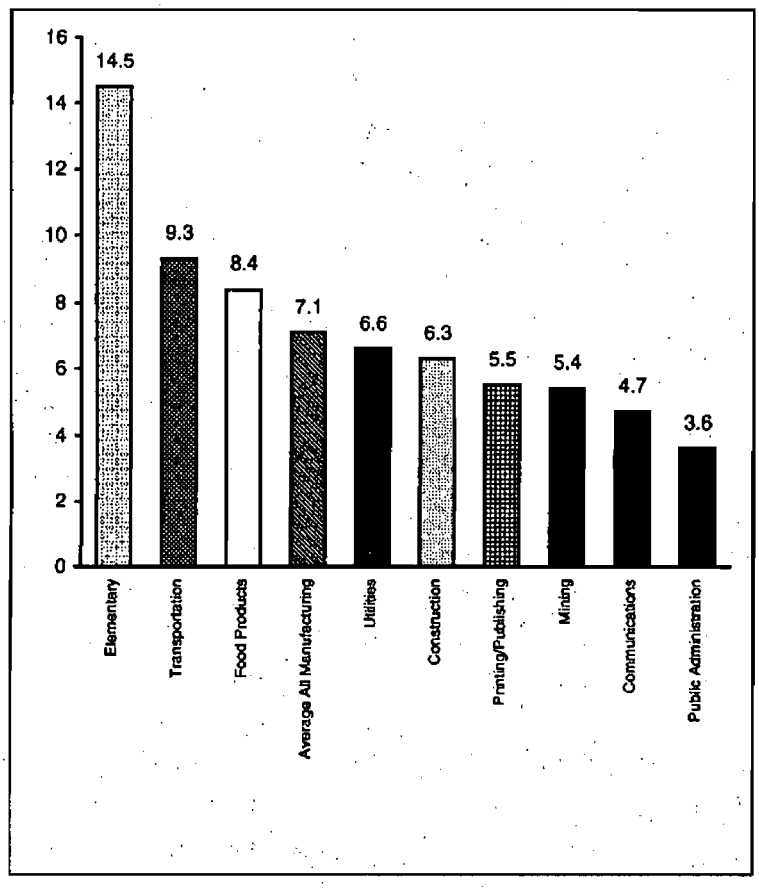
States' Per Pupil Expenditures, 1992-93

Per Pupil Expenditure Range (in dollars)	States
$9,000 and above	Alaska, New Jersey, New York
$8,000 - $8,999	Connecticut
$7,000 - $7,999	Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wisconsin
$6,000 - $6,999	Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming
$5,000 - $5,999	Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia
$4,000 - $4,999	Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Louisiana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee
$3,000 - $3,999	Mississippi, Utah

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

Figure 1

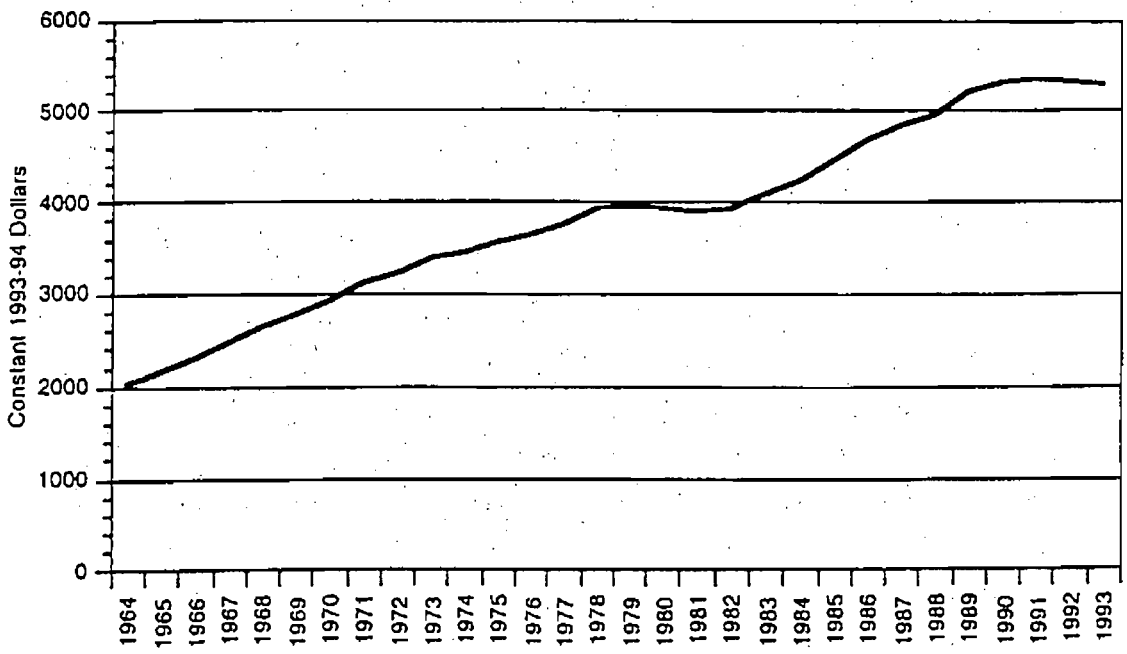
Number of Persons Employed Per Executive, Administrator, and/or Manager in Industries and Occupations



SOURCE: Robinson and Brandon (Perceptions about American Education: Are They Based on Facts?, 1992, p. 15).
STATISTICAL SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics (1991).

Figure 2

U.S. Average Current Per-Pupil Expenditures, 1964-1993



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics.

Table 3

Current Public Expenditure Per Student (in U.S. dollars), by Level of Education and Country, 1988

OECD	Preprimary-secondary	Higher education
Australia	$2,330	$6,119
Austria	3,035	5,371
Canada	3,508	7,109
Denmark	3,964	11,683
Finland	3,778	5,620
France	2,446	4,129
Ireland	1,409	4,615
Italy	2,683	4,007
Japan	1,978	2,042
Luxembourg	4,768	10,470
Netherlands	2,017	9,925
Norway	4,118	6,263
Portugal	1,253	3,778
Spain	1,296	1,748
Sweden	4,509	6,143
Switzerland	5,221	9,669
United Kingdom	2,438	7,862
United States	3,843	5,343
West Germany	2,470	5,185

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Center for Education Research and Innovation, International Indicators Project, International Monetary Fund, Bureau of Financial Statistics, Volume XLI, November 12, 1988

Table 4

Current Public Expenditure on Eduation as a Percentage of GDP, by Level of Education and Country, 1988

OECD	Preprimary-secondary	Higher education	Undistributed	Total
Australia	2.9	1.4	0.1	4.4
Austria	3.6	1.0	0.6	5.2
Canada	3.8	2.1	0.0	5.9
Denmark	4.6	2.0	0.0	6.6
Finland	4.6	1.1	0.5	6.2
France	3.5	0.7	0.6	4.8
Ireland	4.3	1.1	0.1	5.5
Italy	3.4	0.6	0.5	4.5
Japan	2.5	0.3	0.3	3.1
Luxembourg	4.5	0.2	0.5	5.2
Netherlands	3.1	1.7	0.9	5.7
Norway	4.4	1.0	0.8	6.2
Portugal	3.5	0.7	0.1	4.3
Spain	3.0	0.5	0.0	3.5
Sweden	4.6	0.9	0.0	5.5
Switzerland	3.7	0.9	0.0	4.6
United Kingdom	3.4	0.9	0.3	4.6
United States	3.7	1.1	0.0	4.8
West Germany	2.6	0.8	0.5	3.9

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Center for Education Research and Innovation, International Indicators Project, 1992.

about NSBA...

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. NSBA achieves its mission by amplifying the influence of school boards across the country in all public forums relevant to federal and national education issues, by representing the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and by providing vital information and services to Federation Members and school boards throughout the nation.

NSBA advocates local school boards as the ultimate expression of the unique American institution of representative governance of public school districts. NSBA supports the capacity of each school board — acting on behalf of and in close concert with the people of its community — to envision the future of education in its community, to establish a structure and environment that allow all students to reach their maximum potential, to provide accountability for the people of its community on performance in the schools, and to serve as the key community advocate for children and youth and their public schools.

Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NSBA represents the nation's 95,000 school board members. These board members govern 15,025 local school districts that serve more than 40 million public school students — approximately 90 percent of all elementary and secondary school students in the nation. Virtually all school board members are elected; the remainder are appointed by elected officials.

NSBA policy is determined by a 150-member Delegate Assembly of local school board members from throughout the nation. The 24-member Board of Directors translates this policy into action. Programs and services are administered by the NSBA Executive Director, assisted by a professional staff. NSBA is located in metropolitan Washington, D.C.

NSBA Programs and Services

- **National Affiliate Program** — enables school boards to work with their state association and NSBA to identify and influence federal and national trends and issues affecting public school governance.
- **Council of Urban Boards of Education** — serves the governance needs of urban school boards.
- **Large District Forum** — serves the governance needs of large but non-urban boards.
- **Rural and Small District Forum** — serves the governance needs of rural and small enrollment districts.
- **Federal Relations Network** — school board members from each Congressional district actively participate in NSBA's federal and national advocacy efforts.
- **Federal Policy Coordinators Network** — focuses on the administration of federally funded programs.
- **Award Winning Publications** — ***The American School Board Journal***, ***The Executive Educator***, ***School Board News***, and special substantive reports on public school governance throughout the year.
- **Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education** and **Technology Leadership Network** — advances public education through best uses of technology in the classroom and school district operations.
- **Council of School Attorneys** — focuses on school law issues and services to school board attorneys.
- **Annual Conference and Exposition** — the nation's largest policy and training conference for local education officials on national and federal issues affecting the public schools in the United States.
- **National Education Policy Network** — provides the latest policy information nationwide and a framework for public governance through written policies.
- **Training/Development and Clearinghouse Information** — for the policy leadership of state school boards associations and local school boards.

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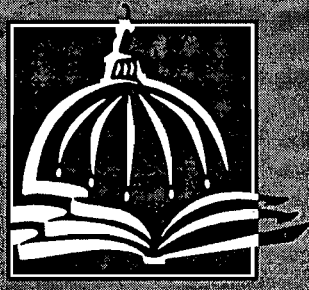
Excellence and Equity in Public Education through School Board Leadership

13



·NSBA·

SCHOOL BOARD ADVOCACY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

TRENDS IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:

A Progress Report

National School Boards Association

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Excellence and Equity in Public Education through School Board Leadership

This publication is the first in a series of research efforts being done by NSBA to provide reliable data, information, analysis, and comments on important problems and issues of concern to persons and organizations responsible for making decisions related to American education.

About the authors: Dr. Karen M. Anderson is Director of Advocacy Research, and Michael A. Resnick is Senior Associate Executive Director, Office of Advocacy at the National School Boards Association.

NSBA Mission Statement: The mission of the National School Boards Association, working with and through all its Federation Members, is to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership.

NSBA Vision for Public Education: The National School Boards Association believes local school boards are the nation's preeminent expression of grass roots democracy and this form of governance of the public schools is fundamental to the continued success of public education. Adequately funded, student-centered public schools will provide, in a safe and supportive environment, a comprehensive education for the whole child and will prepare all of America's children for a lifetime of learning in a diverse, democratic society and an interdependent global economy. America's school boards, by creating a vision of excellence and equity for every child, will provide performance-oriented schools that meet today's problems as well as the challenges of tomorrow.

This report was published and printed in July 1995.

Foreword

The National School Boards Association (NSBA), in conjunction with the nation's state school boards associations and other NSBA Federation active members, is launching a broad-based effort to enhance the image of public education. These efforts are the result of concern in recent years that public confidence in elected school officials has been unreasonably undermined by myths and inaccuracies. The time has come for a concerted advocacy campaign by local school board members in their communities as well as the state school boards associations in their capitals. The goal of the ongoing effort is to make clear to the public that their public schools are succeeding. NSBA will be providing information — issue analysis and ideas — for use in the advocacy effort on behalf of the public schools across the United States.

This report is the first of a series of reports designed to synthesize the research findings in areas of interest to school board members and others working in public education. It is our hope that you will be able to use this information to promote the successes of public education in your community, as well as to contest myths concerning student achievement.

Toward that end, this report sorts through the major sources of student achievement data and shows how these data are interpreted and misinterpreted. Among the findings to be discussed include evidence that in spite of a larger and more heterogeneous test-taking population, SAT scores are going up, particularly for minority students. Other data sources — such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress — corroborate this general finding that student achievement scores have risen over the past 20 years.

International student achievement data present a more complex picture. Depending on how the data are presented, the U.S. compares favorably — typically in the middle of the pack — with other industrialized nations on measures of student achievement. This is true in spite of the very different systems of education across nations. Additionally, U.S. students outperform their peers in terms of high school completion rates and college graduation rates.

This report focuses specifically on student achievement data and how these data have shifted over time. Future reports will focus on school dropout rates, school district expenditures, and so on. This effort is being conducted by NSBA's Advocacy Office, headed by Michael A. Resnick, Senior Associate Executive Director. Karen Anderson, Director of Advocacy Research, authored this report and may be reached at (703) 838-6704.

We hope that you will find this information useful as you launch your advocacy efforts at the state and local levels. We appreciate your commitment and dedication to public education and America's public school children.

Sincerely,

Roberta G. Doering
President

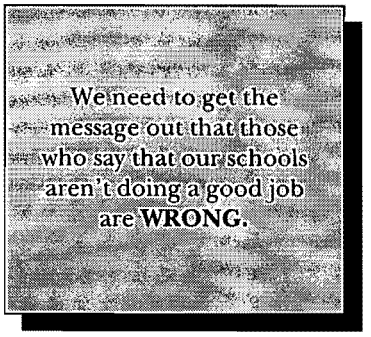
Thomas A. Shannon
Executive Director

Table of Contents

Introduction

There are critics in the media and the general public who find it easy to report that our public schools are failing. They bolster their case by pointing to national test score data. What they do not always know is that these test score data are complicated and thus easy to misread or misuse.

Unfortunately, arguments about declining levels of student achievement become grist for such arguments as "money doesn't matter" or that private education is the answer. As a result, public schools are constantly on the defensive. We need to get the message out that those who say that our schools aren't doing a good job are *wrong*. And the first place to look is at the very research that focuses on student achievement.



This paper sorts through the major sources of national testing data and shows how these data typically are used and misused. It also points out what local school board members can do to build understanding in their own communities about tests and what is happening in the public schools.

One of the problems in looking at nationwide analyses of student achievement data is that there really is no national test that all or even most students take. About the closest we can get to a national test is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is given to randomly selected schools every two years.

Because there is no national test, the press and the public have tended to focus on annual reports of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores. The SAT will be the first test discussed in this report. Additionally, this report will discuss the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the National Education Goals Panel Reports, Advanced Placement Test scores, and the International Assessment of Educational Progress (IAEP).

SAT Scores

Historically, the public and the media have looked at changes in SAT scores as indicative of the health of our nation's education system. Using SAT scores as a thermometer, one could conclude that our schools are quite sick, for the data appear to indicate declines in SAT scores over time. More specifically, there appears to be an overall decline in scores from 1975 to 1989.

On a Parity Basis Test Scores are Up

However, this "decline" can be explained by looking at changes in the demographics of SAT test takers. According to an analysis by David Berliner (1993), the numbers of students taking the SAT increased during these years. Over time, more of these students were from the lower 60% of their high school class. Hence, a greater proportion of SAT test takers now would be expected to do less well than in the past. As a result, although the overall SAT scores trended down after 1975 (because of the greater numbers of test takers from the middle and bottom of their class), subsets of test takers are actually performing better. That is, if we look at the scores of a group of 1990 test takers who match the 1975 test-taking population in terms of class rank, gender, socioeconomic status, minority groups, and so on, then the 1990 group actually scored *higher.* (Scores for white test takers remained flat and did not rise or fall.)

Why Some States do Better on the SAT than Others

Educational researcher Gerald Bracey also notes that the proportion of high scorers on the math portion of the SAT test has increased over time, while the proportion of high scorers for the verbal portion has remained stable. Thus, students taking the SAT are actually doing *better* than previous groups. (See Figure 1 and Table 1 for more information.)

Similarly, on a state-by-state basis — which we often see in press coverage of SAT score data — comparisons are not possible because in some states lower achieving students are not as likely to take the SAT as in other states. According to the College Board, which administers the test, only 42% of all high school seniors nationwide take the SAT. This is hardly a representative sample of the entire population of high school students, for obviously not every high school student takes the SAT. And there is a strong self-selection bias, in that a student who has no intention of attending college is not at all likely to take the SAT. For these students, the SAT says nothing about general student achievement.

The Purpose of the SAT is Not to Measure Student Performance on a Specific Curriculum

Finally, it is essential to keep in mind the original purpose of the SAT — predicting an

individual student's success in college. Using nationally averaged SAT scores as a "national report card" is thus an inappropriate use of the numbers. It is far more appropriate to look at achievement data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for this purpose.

The SAT is not a "high stakes test," in that it is not directly linked to the curriculum of any school system. A true high stakes test is directly tied to a particular curriculum framework and thus is a much more accurate measure of student learning and achievement. (See Appendix B for more information.)

The ACT Exam

Like the SAT, the ACT exam is used by college admissions offices to predict student success in college. ACT scores over time have evidenced the same perceived downward shift in scores as seen with SAT scores. Although not reported as extensively in the national media, the findings regarding populations taking the ACT are similar to those seen with the SAT. Thus, if your district uses ACT scores, the information in this section can still be applied.

Analyzing Your Own School District

So, how should you respond if your district scored below the national average? Remember, the SAT is a measure only of predicted individual success in college. It is not necessarily reflective of success or failure in performance on a school's specific curriculum. It certainly is not a measure of achievement for that portion of your student enrollment whose high school program or interest did not include college.

Lastly, take a close look at the data for your district.

- ☐ How do they look over the last 5 or 10 years?
- ☐ Has the academic spread of students taking the exam changed?
- ☐ Has the socioeconomic composition of the district changed?

In short, SAT scores must be interpreted with caution. Any good look at such scores should be based on disaggregated data — in other words, data broken out by class rank, socioeconomic status of the community, etc. Looking at a school district's "average" SAT score can thus be highly misleading. Be sure to take into account the composition of your own school district!

For more detailed background information on the SAT, please see Appendices A and B. SAT scores are released in the summer of each year, typically in August. Local school systems should prepare in July to determine how they might want to respond to the announcement of scores for their community.

Summary:

- Changes in SAT scores over time are primarily due to shifts in the population of students taking the exam.
- It is essential to remember that the original purpose of the SAT is to predict the probable success in college of an individual student.

NAEP Student Achievement Data

In contrast to SAT scores, NAEP scores are in fact more indicative of general levels of student achievement. The NAEP test is taken by students nationwide at randomly selected public and private schools at ages 9, 13, and 17 years. It is sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the U.S. Department of Education. Unlike the SAT, the students who take the NAEP make up a much more representative sample of the general U.S. student population.

The National Center for Education Statistics has given versions of the NAEP exam since 1969. In 1994, reading, history, and geography was assessed; in 1996, it will be mathematics, science, and the arts.

Areas of Improvement on the NAEP Test

Recent analyses of NAEP data by RAND, a nonprofit research institution, indicate that student math (see Figure 2) and reading (see Figure 3) performance scores for 13 and 17 year olds have *improved* since 1970, the first year data were available. Science proficiency (see Figure 4) also has increased significantly since 1977. This is particularly true for black students, and slightly less so for Hispanic students. In short, the gap between white and non-white students has narrowed (although it still exists). This narrowing is due primarily to improving scores for minority populations.

Student math and reading performance scores for 13 and 17 year olds have **improved** since 1970.

What is responsible for the positive shifts in minority student achievement? The authors of the RAND study suggest it is the steadily increased funding for social programs such as the Chapter 1 compensatory education program, bilingual education, and desegregation policies. If they are correct — and only future research can clarify this — then we should be working to maintain and even increase funding for these and other programs that benefit minority children, youth and families.

In 1990 and 1992, 37 states or territories took part in both of the NAEP tests. *None* of the 37 jurisdictions showed a statistically significant decline in scores since the last testing period, and in fact there were many statistically significant increases.

Imprecise Relationship Between NAEP and Local Curriculum

Some educational researchers have noted that tests such as NAEP are especially sensitive to family or home variables such as single-parent families, education level of the parents, and income level of the community. Because NAEP is not keyed to a particular curriculum — and because American public schools make curriculum decisions at the local level — test questions on the NAEP can be viewed only as a *sample* of what is taught at a particular grade level, not as an indicator of the quality of a school's educational program. In other words, not all schools teach the same subject matter in the same ways.

It also may be that NAEP scores do not reflect adequately the potential sequencing of subject matter across states or school districts. In other words, different areas of the country might emphasize different aspects of mathematics at different points in the curriculum. The NAEP exam is not sensitive to these potential differences in sequencing of subject matter.

Other Measures of Academic Growth

Finally, three other national studies show estimates of academic growth that match those found in the NAEP data. The High School and Beyond, The Longitudinal Study of America's Youth, and Project Talent all have produced results that, in the words of researchers Ralph, Keller & Krouse, are "remarkably similar."

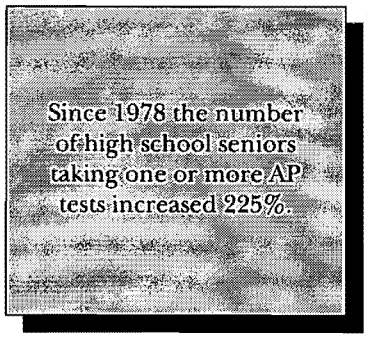
The NAEP exam is given every 2 years, and scores are released by the National Center for Education Statistics throughout the year. Data are aggregated and reported only at the national and state levels — unlike the SAT, students do not receive their individual scores. The Department of Education will release a report on the 1992 NAEP reading scores in September of this year.

Summary:

- The NAEP exam is actually a much better indicator of nationwide student achievement than the SAT.
- It too is a low-stakes test — like the SAT — because it is not tied directly to a particular curriculum.
- It is a better measure than the SAT because it is designed to measure student achievement (not to predict possible success in college) and is comprised of a representative sample (not only prospective college students).
- NAEP scores have remained flat or have risen over time, and scores for minority populations in particular have risen.

Advanced Placement (AP) Tests

Since 1978 the number of high school seniors taking one or more AP tests increased 225%. Much of this increase is due to greater numbers of minority students taking these tests. In spite of the dramatic increase in the numbers of students taking AP tests, there has been little decline in the mean score (11/100 of one point).

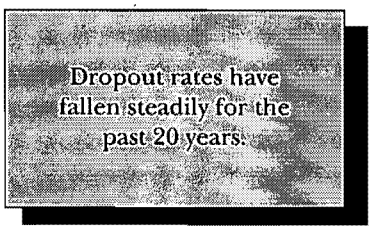


National Education Goals Report

The National Education Goals were created in 1989 by a group of state governors and then-President Bush. The original six National Education Goals were codified into law, along with two new goals focusing on professional development for teachers and increasing parental involvement, as part of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1993.

Each year, the National Education Goals Panel issues a report looking at the nation's progress toward meeting the goals. Sixteen "core indicators" serve as the measure of progress. Unfortunately, for some of these indicators little or no data are available, making it quite difficult to gauge our progress toward all the goals.

However, the 1994 report was able to state that mathematics performance increased at grades 4, 8 and 12 (although the increase at grade 12 was not statistically significant) from 1990 to 1992. No comparable data for reading performance were available for the same time period. (This is based on data from the NAEP exam).



Goal 2 states that by the year 2000, the U.S. will have a high school graduation rate of at least 90%. The 1994 data from the National Center for Educational Statistics indicate that we are almost there — 88% of all adults aged 25-29 had completed high school. Additionally, dropout rates have fallen steadily for the past 20 years, particularly for blacks (data have been broken out by race/ethnic group only since the early 1970s).

The National Education Goals Report is released once a year, usually in September or October. This year, the report is scheduled for release on October 19. Data are reported at the national and state levels, and are reported in terms of national and state standings on each of the 16 indicators.

Other Evidence

The National Center for Education Statistics has reported that *since 1982, the number of students taking math and science classes in high school has risen dramatically,* based upon an examination of high school transcripts. A 1993 study by the Council of Chief State School Officers corroborates these findings.

The National Center for Education Statistics also has reported an increase in the percentage of students taking the "New Basics" core curriculum described in the 1983 document *A Nation at Risk.* (This proposed core curriculum emphasizes course work in English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science.) NCES also reports an increase in the number of students taking college preparatory courses. This finding was especially true for black and Hispanic students.

NCES also studied the participation of high school sophomores in school-sponsored extracurricular activities in 1980 as compared to 1990. During that 10 year period, the only activity in which the level of participation increased was the category of academic clubs. The data indicate that nearly one-third of all high school sophomores participated in such groups.

High school sophomores in 1990, when asked about their future educational aspirations, planned for more education than those asked in 1980. In 1990, 60% said they planned to get a college degree, and 27% said they hoped to get a graduate degree. This is quite an increase when compared to the responses of sophomores in 1980 (41% said they hoped to graduate from college, 18% hoped to attain a post baccalaureate degree).

Summary:

- ❖ Data from a range of other sources indicate overall improvement in student achievement since the 1970s.
- ❖ High school students are taking more challenging courses, graduating from high school at higher rates, and have high expectations for their own futures.

International Student Achievement Data

A related myth about American public schools is that students' performance doesn't measure up to other nations. More specifically, when test scores of U.S. students are compared to those of other countries, our students invariably appear to be lower in the rankings.

Most reports about the poor standing of U.S. students are based upon data from the 1991 International Assessment of Education Progress (IAEP). This exam assessed mathematics and science achievement for 9- and 13-year-olds in 14 countries. With

regards to the mathematics results, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, students from the U.S. at both age levels "scored lower on average in mathematics performance" than students from other large countries. Similarly, in terms of science performance, 13-year-olds from the U.S. ranked last, while 9-year-olds ranked in the middle of the pack. (See Figure 5 for more information).

An international comparison of reading literacy assessment was carried out in 1992 by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. In this case, *9- and 14-year-olds from 32 countries were assessed in terms of their overall reading achievement. U.S. children on the whole did quite well,* with NCES reporting that "9-year-olds from the U.S. performed better on average on the narrative domain than students from other large countries." (See Table 2 and Figure 6 for more information).

Look at Point Spread Not Rankings

Results such as these are commonly reported in terms of a simple rank ordering of national scores, from "best" at the top to "worst" at the bottom. When this occurs, a clear negative message is sent about the performance of U.S. students: The rankings appear to indicate that our children fare poorly in terms of academic achievement. Rank order results on the IAEP, for example, place U.S. students 13th out of 15 countries in science achievement and 14th out of 15 in math achievement.

Rankings, however, obscure important aspects of any such international comparisons. For example, as education researcher Gerald Bracey has pointed out, despite the rankings, the few points separating U.S. student performance and those nations above and below are insignificant on a scale that scores U.S. performance at 53.5 (see Table 2). In other words, critics want to rank nations as though they were in a horse race. Yet for the purposes of measuring performance, the actual point spread between many nations — including the U.S. — makes no difference and they are not significantly different from each other.

U.S. Students Cannot Be Compared to Other Students

In many European countries, children are tracked from a very early age into very different curriculum tracks... in the U.S., there is no national curriculum.

There are a number of other statistical and technical reasons to interpret international comparisons data with caution. One such issue is the question of whether the samples of students being compared are truly comparable. Many examples abound, such as the fact that in many European countries, children are tracked from a very early age into very different curriculum tracks. School completion rates are also much lower in many other nations, leading to a "creaming" phenomenon where only the brightest students finish high school. (The international comparisons described here are based on data where representative samples of the eligible population were tested). The curriculum issue raises another important point — in the U.S., there is no national curriculum. Therefore, there is no way to ensure that children are learning the same

information in the same order or sequence. Finally, in the U.S., comparatively large numbers of students go on to attend college, in contrast to high school graduates in other nations. Thus, much of what is taught in our college-level education system is learned earlier by students in other nations. In other words, the timing of the learning is different, not whether the material is eventually learned.

Other school- and curriculum-based differences may also contribute to differing levels of achievement. Japan, for example, requires students to spend a great deal more time both in school and in after-school academic activities such as "cram courses". In contrast, U.S. students often participate in a wide range of nonschool activities designed to develop and enhance skills other than academics (Little League, dance classes, music or art experiences, and so on).

International comparisons of student achievement data are also complicated by cultural factors. Writer David Berliner, for example, reports that for Korean students, high performance on an exam like the IAEP is considered to be a national honor. In contrast, a low-stakes test such as this one probably does little to encourage an American student's best performance. Additionally, *other nations are much more culturally homogeneous* than the U.S. Test scores in a culturally heterogeneous society like that of the U.S. are likely to show a much greater variability in scores. The U.S. also has a much greater proportion of low-income students in its public school systems.

Indicators of Superior U.S. Student Achievement

There are also international comparisons of student achievement data where the U.S. is doing much better than other nations. For example, in looking at international comparisons of school completion rates, the U.S. actually does quite well. The U.S. has a much higher secondary school graduation rate (86%) than Japan, Germany, the U.K., France, Italy, or Canada. This is also true for higher education attainment — the U.S. has a higher percentage of students completing four or more years of college than any of these nations.

In 1989, as described earlier, the National Education Goals were proposed. Goal 4 states that by the year 2000, "U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement." One of the difficulties in monitoring our nation's progress towards this goal is the lack of international comparison data (with the exceptions of the two studies described above). To remedy this, this year, there will be another iteration of the IAEP study of math and science achievement. Results from this study will not be available until 1996 or 1997, however.

Summary:

- International comparisons of student achievement are typically reported as international rankings, which tends to obscure the often minimal differences between nations in terms of student achievement.
- Although in looking at the rankings the U.S. appears to be doing poorly, we are also doing much better in some areas such as school completion and college attendance.

How You Can Use This Information

1. **Talk with the media.** Use this information to help prepare for the annual August release of SAT scores. In advance of the release of the scores, consider meeting with the education reporters for the daily newspapers in your area. Don't forget to talk with television and radio reporters as well. Provide them with this more accurate interpretation of how scores are analyzed and describe the situation in your district. Provide some information on innovative/successful programs in your district that will further student achievement.

   Several weeks prior to the August release of SAT scores, write a commentary or op-ed piece for the local newspaper on how to interpret SAT scores.

   For a sample "Letter to the Editor" focusing on SAT scores, please see Appendix B.

2. **Talk to the Community.** Refer to this information at school board meetings, parent-teacher organization meetings or other events where the subjects of test scores and student achievement are discussed. It might be especially important to do this directly prior to the release of SAT or other test scores in the media.

3. **Publish the positive facts about your public schools.** Don't let the "negative news media" get away with public school bashing. The facts show that schools are doing better — not worse — at advancing student achievement. Develop a brief summary of the purpose of the SAT and other tests that are relevant to your community describing what they do and do not prove. Write an article for a newsletter or other publication that shows the more accurate understanding of test scores and achievement. Including that information in school newsletters can go a long way toward building support among parents and others who are involved with the schools.

4. **Keep this report handy!** Use the information in this report to make the case that public education is succeeding and to respond to questions from the community and the media.

For Further Information, Please Contact
Karen Anderson, Director of Advocacy Research at
703-838-6704

References

For further information, you might want to look at the following articles:

1. Berliner, David C. Mythology and the American System of Education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 1993, pps 632-640.

2. Bracey, Gerald W. The Media's Myth of School Failure. *Educational Leadership*, September 1994, pps 80-83.

3. The second Bracey report on the condition of public education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 1992, pps 106-117.

4. The third Bracey report on the condition of public education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 1993, pps 105-117.

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6. Carson, C.C., Huelskamp, R.M., & Woodall, T.D. Perspectives on Education in America: An Annotated Briefing, April 1992. *Journal of Educational Research*, May/June 1993, pps 86, 259-307.

7. Grissmer, David W., Kirby, Sheila Nataraj, Berends, Mark, & Williamson, Stephanie. *Student Achievement and the Changing American Family: An Executive Summary.* RAND Institute on Education and Training, 1994.

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11. Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development. *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators.* 1995.

12. Ralph, John, Keller, Dana, & Crouse, James. How Effective are American Schools? *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 1994, pps 144-150.

Appendix A

Background Information on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

The SAT was designed in the 1940s as an indicator of individual success in college. When the test was created, it was normed on 10,654 students primarily from the northeastern United States, 98% of whom were white, over 60% of whom were male, and all of whom were planning to attend private colleges or universities. In contrast, 30% of those who took the SAT in 1994 were minority, and 52% were female. Thus, over time, the population of test takers has shifted dramatically. In 1994, 1,050,386 students took the SAT (or 100 times the original test group).

The test has been recentered recently on a more representative sample so that the average score again will be 500 for each section of the exam (math and verbal components). This should make it easier to compare disaggregated scores across groups.

Scores on the SAT are fitted to a normal distribution, or "bell curve." What this means is that the test is designed so that few people can score well. Thus, the small proportion of students scoring at the high end is due to the demands of the test authors, rather than being an indication of poor academic performance.

Traditionally, there have been interstate differences in average performance on the SAT. This is due not to lower-performing students in some states than others, but to factors such as the number of students in a state who take the exam. (Iowa, for example, historically has high SAT scores, but 98% of Iowa's population is white, and the state has very few urban poor areas).

Appendix B

May 30, 1995

Letter to the Editor
The Fairfax Journal
2720 Prosperity Avenue
Merrifield, VA 22034

Dear Editor:

In your May 16 editorial entitled "Just 'perfect,'" you bemoaned the fact that SAT scores have been recentered and it is now possible to receive a score of 1600 even while answering a few questions incorrectly. You are missing the point of the SAT exam. The SAT was designed with one purpose in mind: the prediction of individual college success. Period. It is not designed to be a "national report card," nor is it designed to be, as you put it, part of our "understanding on a national scale of what is happening in schools." It simply was not designed for that purpose.

In the United States, we have a strong and long-standing tradition of local control of public education. This means that there is no national curriculum. Additionally, schools do not make curriculum decisions based upon teaching to the SAT. If, in fact, our teachers did link both the curriculum and their instructional abilities and energies directly to the SAT, then we could make the claim that the SAT is a direct measure of student achievement. But we cannot do that, given the current circumstances under which students take the SAT. Again, its purpose is to predict which students are likely to be successful in college, not to determine how well they learned the curriculum offered in high school.

The central reason for the decline in SAT scores over the past 20 years is that over time an increasing percentage of students from the middle of their high school class have taken the SAT exam in order to realize the dream of college admission.

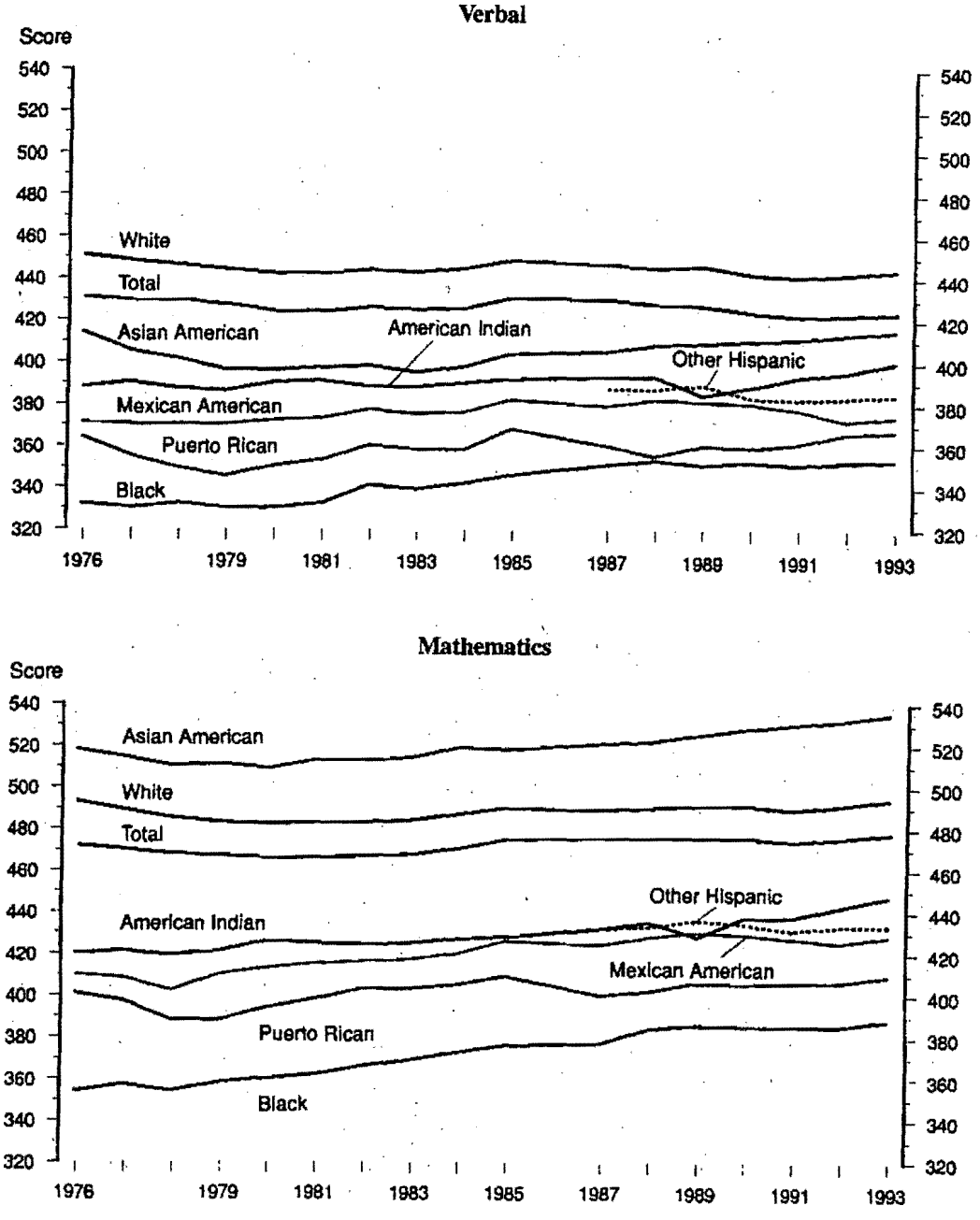
Further, the SAT exam is not scored as a straight percentage of correct answers; rather, scores are fitted to a "normal curve." This is how it was possible in the past to get one wrong answer yet only receive a score of 760 — or 40 points from "perfect." Taking all these factors together, when "average" SAT scores swing across a narrow range from year to year, very little can be concluded from looking at aggregated scores.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Resnick
Great Falls, VA 22066

Figure 1

Mean verbal and mathematics SAT scores, by race/ethnicity: 1976–93



SOURCE: College Entrance Examination Board, *National Report: College Bound Seniors*, 1972–1993 (Copyright © 1993 by College Entrance Examination Board. All rights reserved.)

SAT mean scores of college-bound seniors, by race/ethnicity: 1976–93

	Total		White		Black		Mexican American		Puerto Rican		Other Hispanic		Asian American		American Indian		Other	
Year	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math
1976	431	472	451	493	332	354	371	410	364	401	—	—	414	518	388	420	410	458
1977	429	470	448	489	330	357	370	408	355	397	—	—	405	514	390	421	402	457
1978	429	468	446	485	332	354	370	402	349	388	—	—	401	510	387	419	399	450
1979	427	467	444	483	330	358	370	410	345	388	—	—	396	511	386	421	393	447
1980	424	466	442	482	330	360	372	413	350	394	—	—	396	509	390	426	394	449
1981	424	466	442	483	332	362	373	415	353	398	—	—	397	513	391	425	388	447
1982	426	467	444	483	341	366	377	416	360	403	—	—	398	513	388	424	392	449
1983	425	468	443	484	339	369	375	417	358	403	—	—	395	514	388	425	386	446
1984	426	471	445	487	342	373	376	420	358	405	—	—	398	519	390	427	388	450
1985	431	475	449	490	346	376	382	426	368	409	—	—	404	518	392	428	391	448
1986	431	475	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1987	430	476	447	489	351	377	379	424	360	400	387	432	405	521	393	432	405	455
1988	428	476	445	490	353	384	382	428	355	402	387	433	408	522	393	435	410	460
1989	427	476	446	491	351	386	381	430	360	406	389	436	409	525	384	428	414	467
1990	424	476	442	491	352	385	380	429	359	405	383	434	410	528	388	437	410	467
1991	422	474	441	489	351	385	377	427	361	406	382	431	411	530	393	437	411	466
1992	423	476	442	491	352	385	372	425	366	406	383	433	413	532	395	442	417	473
1993	424	478	444	494	353	388	374	428	367	409	384	433	415	535	400	447	422	477

—Not available.

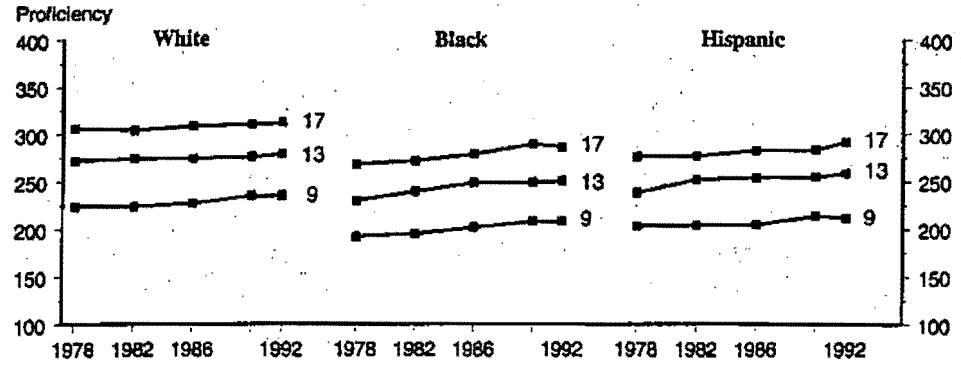
NOTE: The first year for which SAT scores by racial/ethnic group are available is 1976. Data were not collected by racial/ethnic group in 1986. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 19* for information on interpreting SAT scores.

SOURCE: College Entrance Examination Board, *National Report: College-Bound Seniors*, 1972–1993 (Copyright © 1993 by College Entrance Examination Board. All rights reserved.)

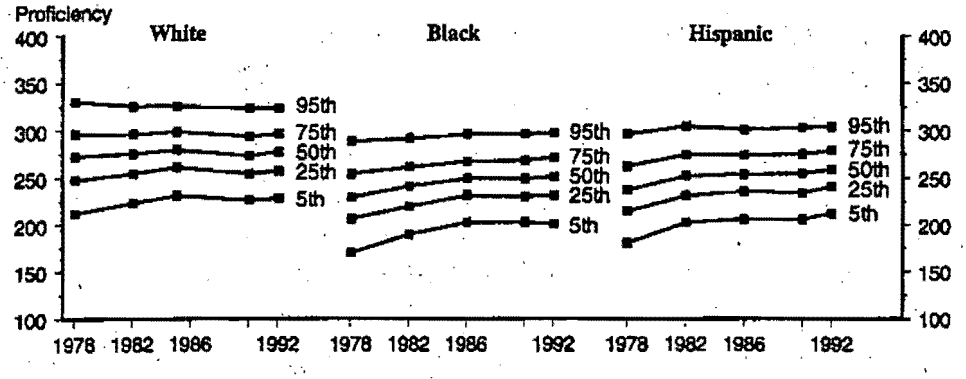
Figure 2

Average mathematics proficiency (scale score), by race/ethnicity, age, and percentile ranking: 1978–92

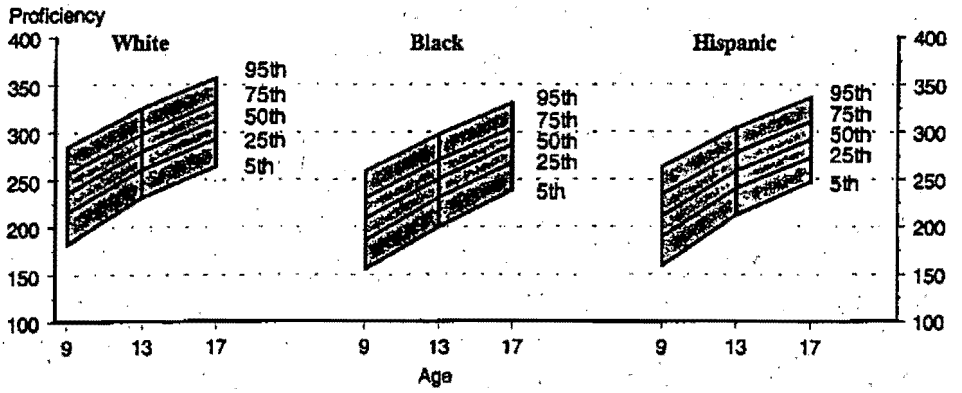
Average mathematics proficiency, by race/ethnicity and age



Percentile distribution of mathematics proficiency for 13-year-olds, by race/ethnicity



Percentile distribution of mathematics proficiency, by age and race/ethnicity for 1992



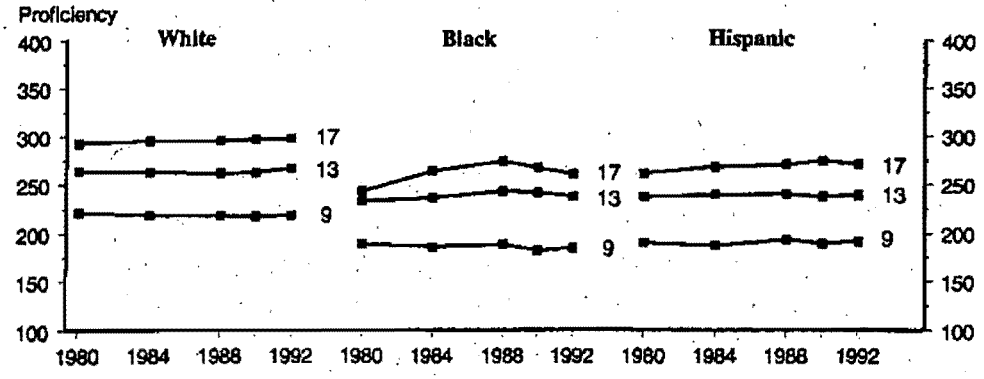
NOTE: The mathematics proficiency scale has a range from 0 to 500.

SOURCE: National Assessment of Educational Progess, *Trends in Academic Progress: Achievement of U.S. Students in Science, 1969 to 1992, Mathematics, 1973 to 1992, Reading1971 to 1992, Writing 1984 to 1992*, 1994.

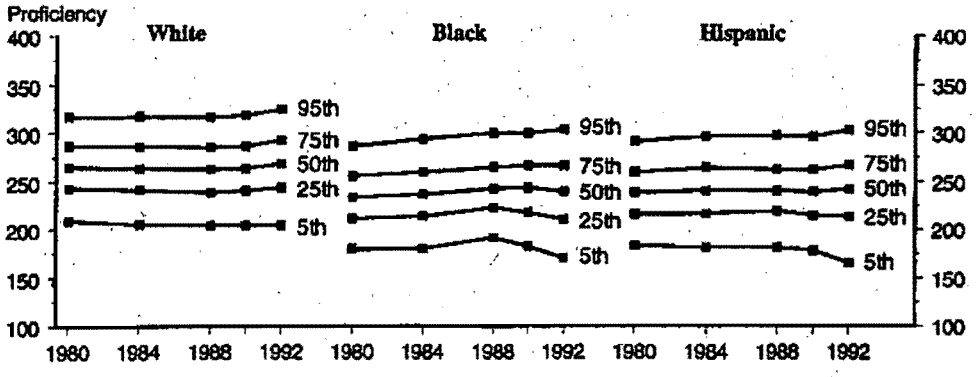
Figure 3

Average reading proficiency (scale score), by race/ethnicity, age, and percentile ranking: 1980–92

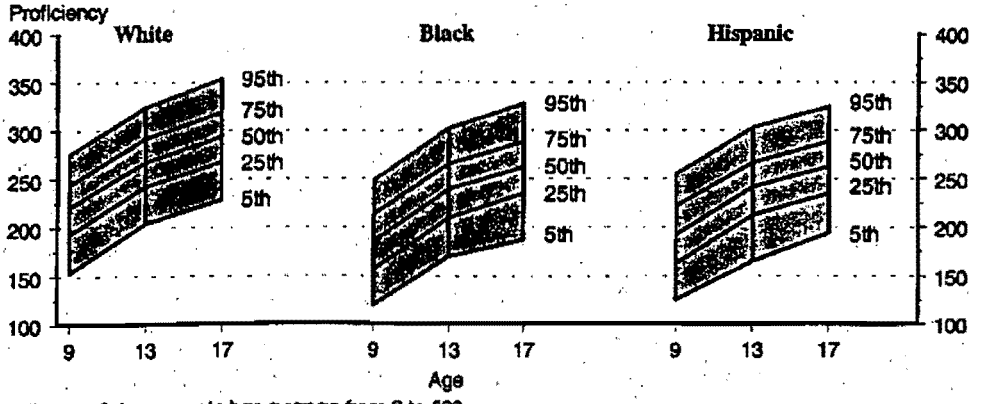
Average reading proficiency, by race/ethnicity and age



Percentile distribution of reading proficiency for 13-year-olds, by race/ethnicity



Percentile distribution of reading proficiency, by age and race/ethnicity for 1992



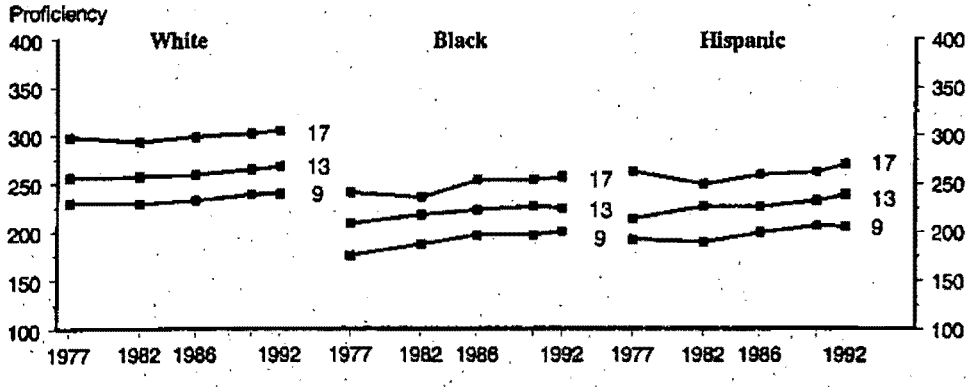
NOTE: The reading proficiency scale has a range from 0 to 500.

SOURCE: National Assessment of Educational Progess. *Trends in Academic Progress: Achievement of U.S. Students in Science, 1969 to 1992, Mathematics, 1973 to 1992, Reading, 1971 to 1992, Writing, 1984 to 1992*, 1994.

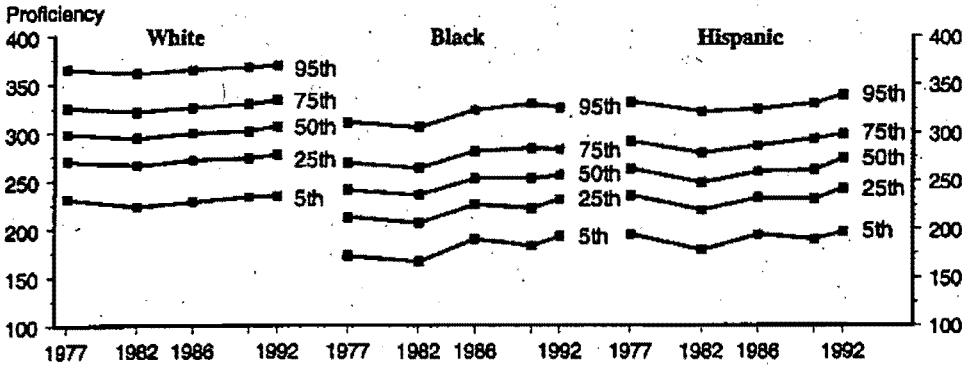
Figure 4

Average science proficiency (scale score), by race/ethnicity, age, and percentile ranking: 1977–92

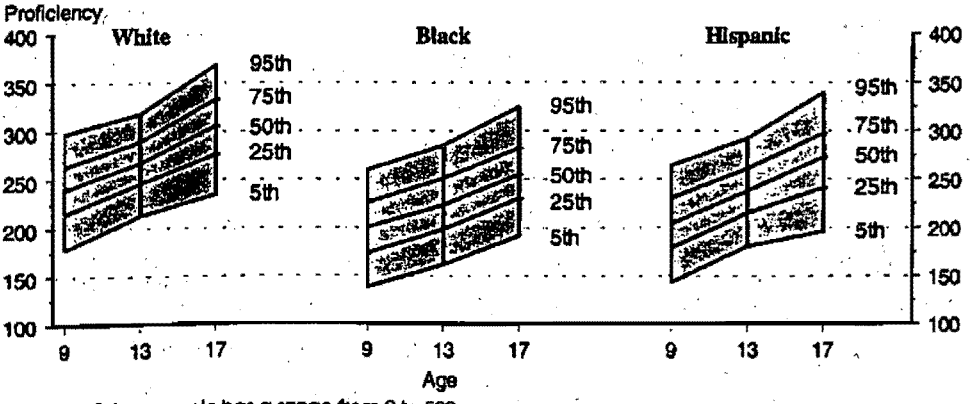
Average science proficiency, by race/ethnicity and age



Percentile distribution of science proficiency for 17-year-olds, by race/ethnicity



Percentile distribution of science proficiency, by age and race/ethnicity for 1992



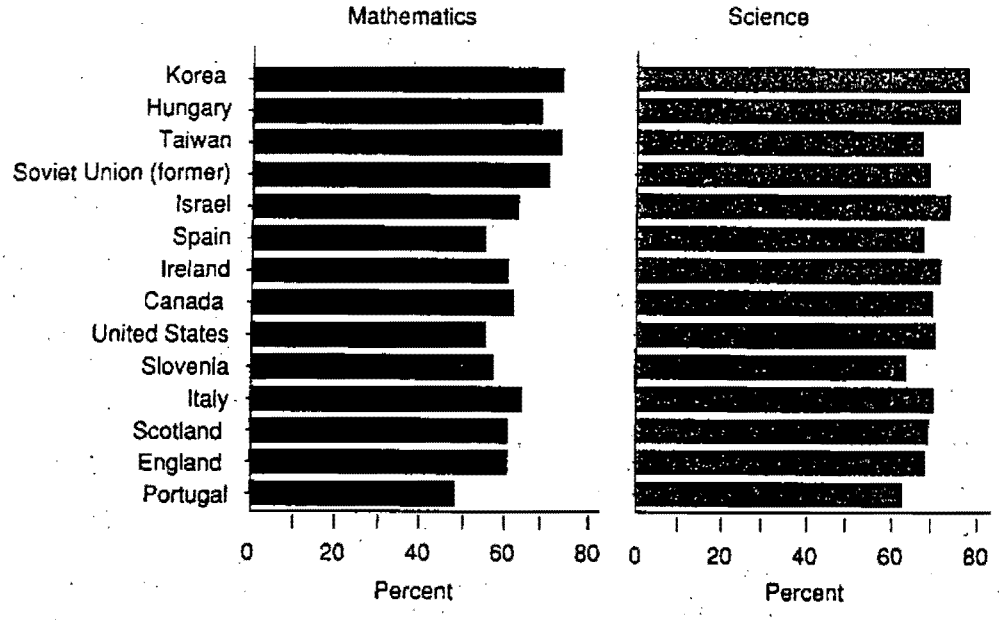
NOTE: The science proficiency scale has a range from 0 to 500.

SOURCE: National Assessment of Educational Progess, *Trends in Academic Progress: Achievement of U.S. Students in Science, 1969 to 1992, Mathematics, 1973 to 1992, Reading 1971 to 1992, Writing 1984 to 1992*, 1994.

Figure 5

International Mathematics and Science Comparison

Average percent correct on international mathematics and science assessments of 13-year-olds in selected countries: 1991



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, International Assessment of Educational Progress, *Learning Mathematics;* and *Learning Science,* prepared by Educational Testing Service.

In a 1991 International Assessment of Educational Progress (IAEP) in mathematics and science, 13-year-old U.S. students performed at or near the IAEP average in science, and below the average in mathematics. U.S. students were not among the highest performing group in either subject.

Table 2

International Reading Comparison

Average score on an international reading assessment of 14-year-olds in selected countries and provinces: 1990

Country	Mean score	Below the U.S.[1]	About the same as the U.S.[1]	Higher than the U.S.[1]	Mean age	Grade tested
Finland	560			X	14.7	8
France	549		X		15.4	9
Sweden	546		X		14.8	8
New Zealand	545		X		15.0	10
Hungary	536		X		14.1	8
Iceland	536		X		14.8	8
Switzerland	536		X		14.9	8
Hong Kong	535		X		15.2	9
United States	535		X		15.0	9
Singapore	534		X		14.4	8
Slovenia	532		X		14.7	8
Germany, former East	526		X		14.4	8
Denmark	525		X		14.8	8
Portugal	523		X		15.6	9
Canada, British Columbia	522		X		13.9	8
Germany, former West	522		X		14.6	8
Norway	516	X			14.8	8
Italy	515	X			14.1	8
Netherlands	514		X		14.3	8
Ireland	511	X			14.5	9
Greece	509	X			14.4	9
Cyprus	497	X			14.8	9
Spain	490	X			14.2	8
Belgium, French	481	X			14.3	8
Trinidad/Tobago	479	X			14.4	9
Thailand[2]	477	X			15.2	9
Philippines	430	X			14.5	8
Venezuela	417	X			15.5	9
Nigeria[2]	401	X			15.3	9
Zimbabwe[2]	372	X			15.5	9
Botswana	330	X			14.7	9

[1] Significance test at the 95 percent confidence level.
[2] Sampling response rate of schools was below 80 percent.

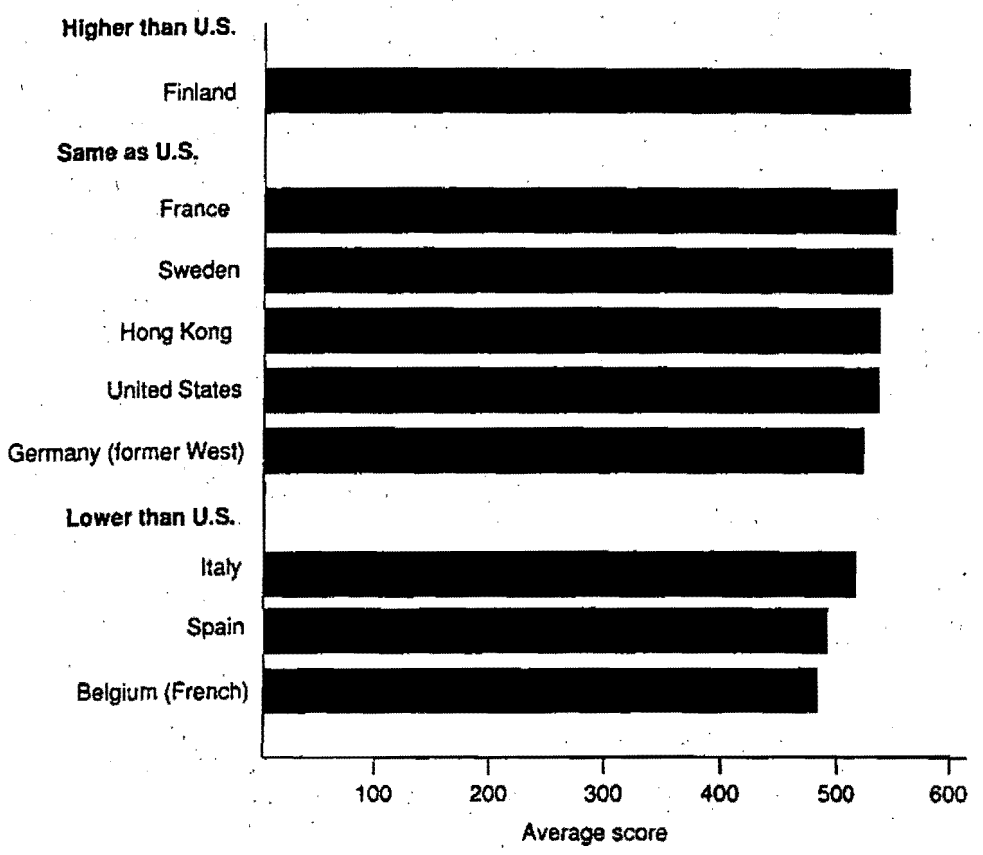
NOTE: Score distributions are based on a mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100.

SOURCE: The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, *How in the World Do Students Read?*

Figure 6

International Reading Comparison

Average reading assessment score of 14-year-olds in selected countries: 1990



SOURCE: The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, *How in the World Do Students Read?*

In a 1990 international reading assessment, the United States was in the second cluster for both 9- and 14-year-olds. At both age levels only Finland outperformed U.S. students. Countries ranking about equal to the U.S. for 14-year-olds were France, Sweden, New Zealand, Hungary, Iceland, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Slovenia, Germany (former East and West), Denmark, Portugal, Canada (British Columbia), and the Netherlands.

about NSBA...

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. NSBA achieves its mission by amplifying the influence of school boards across the country in all public forums relevant to federal and national education issues, by representing the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and by providing vital information and services to Federation Members and school boards throughout the nation.

NSBA advocates local school boards as the ultimate expression of the unique American institution of representative governance of public school districts. NSBA supports the capacity of each school board — acting on behalf of and in close concert with the people of its community — to envision the future of education in its community, to establish a structure and environment that allow all students to reach their maximum potential, to provide accountability for the people of its community on performance in the schools, and to serve as the key community advocate for children and youth and their public schools.

Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NSBA represents the nation's 95,000 school board members. These board members govern 15,025 local school districts that serve more than 40 million public school students — approximately 90 percent of all elementary and secondary school students in the nation. Virtually all school board members are elected; the remainder are appointed by elected officials.

NSBA policy is determined by a 150-member Delegate Assembly of local school board members from throughout the nation. The 24-member Board of Directors translates this policy into action. Programs and services are administered by the NSBA Executive Director, assisted by a professional staff. NSBA is located in metropolitan Washington, D.C.

NSBA Programs and Services

- **National Affiliate Program** — enables school boards to work with their state association and NSBA to identify and influence federal and national trends and issues affecting public school governance.
- **Council of Urban Boards of Education** — serves the governance needs of urban school boards.
- **Large District Forum** — serves the governance needs of large but non-urban boards.
- **Rural and Small District Forum** — serves the governance needs of rural and small enrollmentdistricts.
- **Federal Relations Network** — school board members from each Congressional district actively participate in NSBA's federal and national advocacy efforts.
- **Federal Policy Coordinators Network** — focuses on the administration of federally funded programs.
- **Award Winning Publications** — ***The American School Board Journal***, ***The Executive Educator***, ***School Board News***, and special substantive reports on public school governance throughout the year.
- **Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education** and **Technology Leadership Network** — advances public education through best uses of technology in the classroom and school districtoperations.
- **Council of School Attorneys** — focuses on school law issues and services to school board attorneys.
- **Annual Conference and Exposition** — the nation's largest policy and training conference for local education officials on national and federal issues affecting the public schools in the United States.
- **National Education Policy Network** — provides the latest policy information nationwide and a framework for public governance through written policies.
- **Training/Development and Clearinghouse Information** — for the policy leadership of state school boards associations and local school boards.

·NSBA·

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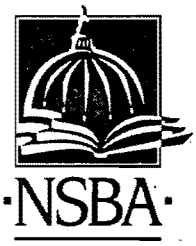

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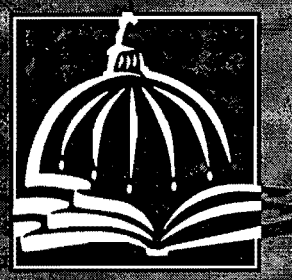
Excellence and Equity in Public Education through School Board Leadership



NSBA

SCHOOL BOARD ADVOCACY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES: A Public School Success Story

National School Boards Association

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Excellence and Equity in Public Education through School Board Leadership

This publication is the second in a series of research efforts being done by NSBA to provide reliable data, information, analysis, and comments on important problems and issues of concern to persons and organizations responsible for making decisions related to American education.

About the authors: Dr. Karen M. Anderson is Director of Advocacy Research, and Michael A. Resnick is Senior Associate Executive Director, Office of Advocacy at the National School Boards Association.

NSBA Mission Statement: The mission of the National School Boards Association, working with and through all its Federation Members, is to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership.

NSBA Vision for Public Education: The National School Boards Association believes local school boards are the nation's preeminent expression of grass roots democracy and this form of governance of the public schools is fundamental to the continued success of public education. Adequately funded, student-centered public schools will provide, in a safe and supportive environment, a comprehensive education for the whole child and will prepare all of America's children for a lifetime of learning in a diverse, democratic society and an interdependent global economy. America's school boards, by creating a vision of excellence and equity for every child, will provide performance-oriented schools that meet today's problems as well as the challenges of tomorrow.

This report was published and printed in January 1996.

Foreword

The National School Boards Association (NSBA), in conjunction with the nation's state school boards associations and other NSBA Federation active members, is engaged in a broad-based effort to build support for public education — and celebrate its successes. This effort is the result of concern in recent years that public confidence in the performance of the nation's public schools is being undermined by inaccurate information.

The time has come for a concerted advocacy campaign by local school board members in their communities as well as state school boards associations in their state capitals. The goal of this ongoing effort is to make clear to the public that their public schools are succeeding and to accurately describe where progress still needs to be made. Consequently, NSBA is providing information — issue analysis and ideas — for use in the advocacy effort on behalf of the public schools across the United States.

Myth: More and more students are dropping out of school before earning the high school degree. Reality: More and more students are staying in school to complete high school.

This report is the second of a series of reports designed to synthesize and highlight the research findings in areas of interest to school board members and others working in public education. It is our hope that you will be able to use this information to promote the successes of public education in your community, as well as to contest the myths concerning school dropout rates.

Toward that end, this report focuses specifically on demographic data, school dropout and school completion rates, and the link between school completion and later economic productivity. Future reports will focus on correcting other publicly held inaccuracies relating to such areas as school district expenditures and comparisons with private education. This effort is being conducted by NSBA's Advocacy Office, headed by Michael A. Resnick, Senior Associate Executive Director. Karen Anderson, Director of Advocacy Research, authored this report and may be reached at (703) 838-6704.

We hope that you find this information useful as you launch your advocacy efforts at the state and local levels. We appreciate your commitment and dedication to public education and America's public school children.

Sincerely,

Roberta G. Doering
President

Thomas A. Shannon
Executive Director

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Figures and Tables

Introduction

One of the untold successes of our public education system is the dramatic decline in high school dropout rates. We hear it stated as "fact" that more and more students are dropping out, presumably because of the alleged poor quality of our public schools. In fact — as will be demonstrated by the data in this report — our schools are graduating more students than ever before, and at a time when demographic shifts indicate that our schools are serving an increasingly diverse population.

Nevertheless, school officials clearly want to continue to graduate as many students as possible. Indeed, in recent years public schools have successfully improved their program offerings to a broader range of students and have helped foster student commitment to complete high school. The public needs to be aware of the immense negative consequences associated with dropping out. For example:

An accumulation of data indicates that school dropouts have significantly poorer employment prospects. . .

- An accumulation of data indicates that school dropouts have significantly poorer employment prospects — only 36% of high school dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 were employed in October of 1992.

- Workers who haven't completed high school are 170% more likely to face unemployment. When they are unemployed, their periods of unemployment last about 30% longer than those of college-educated workers.

- Secretary of Education Richard Riley cites Justice Department data showing that 80% of all prison inmates are high school dropouts — at an average annual cost of more than $21,000 to support one prisoner.

- And in 1992, high school dropouts were three times more likely to receive welfare benefits when compared to high school graduates, at a combined federal and state cost of $22.2 billion.

Although we can't conclude that failing to complete school always causes the above outcomes, minimally, dropping out certainly adds to the risk that many such individuals will face long term unemployment. Whether a principal cause or supporting factor, it seems clear that it is in our nation's best interests — and in the interests of cost-effectiveness with use of the public's tax dollars — to keep the nation's high school students in school until they graduate.

There are a number of broader societal benefits to supporting educational attainment as well. For example, high school graduates are far more likely to vote than dropouts. Also, adults with more education demonstrate a greater knowledge of healthy behaviors, which in turn might affect health care costs in the long run.

At the same time, the population of students attending public schools today has shifted dramatically during the past several decades, making the issue of keeping these students in school all the more complex.

Demographic Data: Who Do Our Schools Serve?

Statistics reported at the 1995 meeting of the National Governors' Association indicate that the number of children living in poverty has risen dramatically in recent years. In 1970, 2.1 million children under the age of six lived in poverty. Today, that figure has risen to 6.5 million. The Census Bureau reports that more than one in five American children (22%) lives below the poverty line. The percentage of children living in poverty in the United States is higher than that of many other industrialized nations, including Sweden (5%), Germany (5%), Australia (16%), and Canada (15%). Poverty data are important because students from low-income families are far more likely to leave school without completing a high school degree, as will be discussed later in this report.

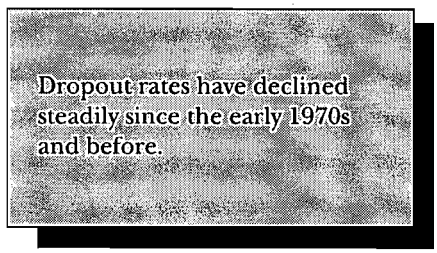
What factors are responsible for this sharp increase in poverty rates among our nation's children? Most experts point first to major changes in the family structure. For example, in the United States, 33% of all babies are born to unmarried women; this is triple the 1970 rate. One-parent homes — particularly those headed up by single mothers — are particularly at risk. Although families headed by single mothers account for only about 17.5% of the population as a whole, they account for more than 54% of all poor families.

Other factors contributing to the increase in children and families living in poverty are declines in both real wages, particularly for those workers with limited education, and declining support from government programs. This last factor — shrinking government benefits for low-income families — is likely to be exacerbated, at least in the short run, assuming implementation of the widespread changes being considered for the current system of welfare benefits.

The racial and ethnic composition of students attending public schools is another example of large demographic shifts. During the next 35 years, the number of Hispanic, Asian, and African American students will increase. As will be discussed later in this report, socioeconomic factors associated with these demographic shifts (e.g., increases in families living in poverty; increases in the number of languages spoken in the schools), as well as specific strategies within society as a whole to address them, could have a profound effect on school completion rates and affect overall educational performance in the public schools.

Dropout Data

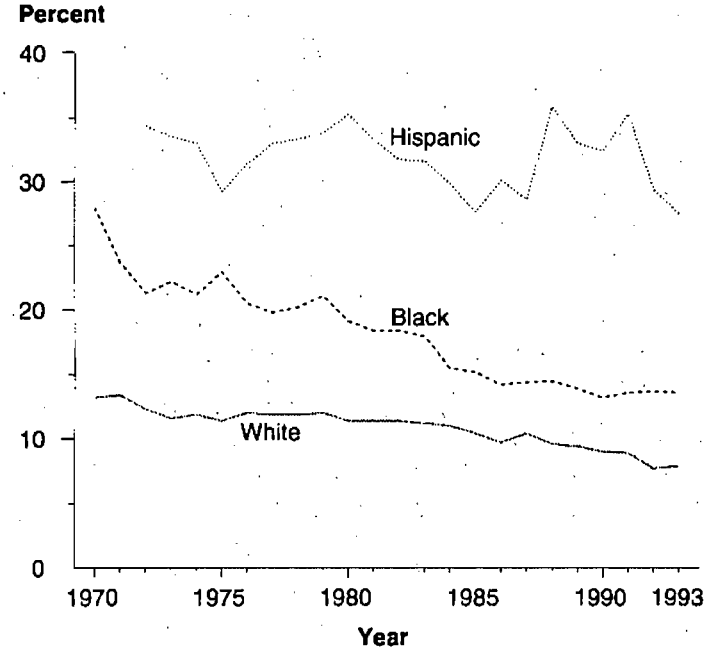
What We Know About Dropout Rates



One of the myths perpetuated by critics of public education is that student dropout rates are higher today than in the past. However, the data tell us that, in actuality, nothing could be further from the truth. Although school dropout data are notoriously difficult to collect, these data indicate that dropout rates have declined steadily since the early 1970s and before. (School dropout rates are difficult to interpret reliably because at present, there is no comprehensive mechanism in place for school districts to utilize in sharing information and student records when a student moves from one district to another).

The dramatic decline in dropout rates over time is particularly true for black students, and the gap between black and white dropout rates has narrowed substantially. Dropout rates for Hispanic students, however, remain high (28% in 1993, compared to 8% for whites and 14% for blacks); these statistics will be discussed in greater detail in a later section. See Figure 1 for more information on dropout rates over time.

Figure 1
Percent of high school dropouts among 16- to 24-year-olds, by race: 1970 to 1993



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

School Completion Rates Are on the Rise

School completion rates, as distinguished from dropout rates, focus instead on the number of students who successfully complete high school or its equivalency. There are several different ways of conceptualizing these data. School *graduation* rates focus on the total number of students who receive a standard high school diploma in the typical 4 year time span. School *completion* rates, on the other hand, take into account those students who have attained alternative credentials such as the GED. Again, over time the results are encouraging: Since 1972, school completion rates increased steadily. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 1950 — which school critics think of as the "good old days" — only 34% of the population completed 4 years of high school. In contrast, school completion rates today show that about 86% of 22-year-olds have completed high school or its equivalency. See Table 1 for population percentage information. See also Table 2 at the end of this report for state-level school completion rates.

> . . . in 1950, only 34% of the population completed 4 years of high school.

Table 1

Percent of Persons 25 Years and Older Who Completed Various Years of School: 1960 to 1993

Year	Less than 5 years of elementary school	4 years of high school or more	4 or more years of college
April 1960	8.3	41.1	7.7
March 1970	5.3	55.2	11.0
March 1980	3.4	68.6	17.0
March 1985	2.7	73.9	19.4
March 1986	2.7	74.7	19.4
March 1987	2.4	75.6	19.9
March 1988	2.4	76.2	20.3
March 1989	2.5	76.9	21.1
March 1990	2.4	77.6	21.3
March 1991	2.4	78.4	21.4
March 1992	2.8	80.8	21.4
March 1993	2.1	81.5	21.9

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

It is also important to note that longitudinal studies — data that follow the same group of people longitudinally over time — indicate that many of those students who do drop out eventually return to school and successfully complete an equivalency degree. In fact, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in recent years about 88% of all 25- to 29-year-olds have earned a high school diploma or its equivalent. (The discrepancy between this number and the 81.5% in Table 1 above is due to differences in population — Table 1 includes the entire population, not just 25- to 29-year-olds).

Why Students Drop Out of School

Why do students drop out of school? The primary risk factor associated with dropping out is low family income. Students from low income families are far more likely to drop out of school than students from middle or high income families.

The Department of Education reports that data from the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study indicates that about 28% of those students who dropped out reported "found a job" as a reason for leaving school. This was especially true for male dropouts (36%) as compared to female dropouts (22%).

Pregnancy is a major risk factor for young women. In fact, according to the National Dropout Prevention Center, teen pregnancy accounts for 50% of all female high school dropouts.

Data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics also suggest that poor attendance, lower grades, and being overage by a year or more than one's classmates, especially when due to being held back or retained in school, may also predict which students will leave school before completing a degree.

In general, poor academic performance — and in particular, poor reading performance — plus little or no involvement in other school activities increases the likelihood that a student will drop out of school.

It should be noted that, in addition to broadening high quality programming to non-college bound students in general, many school districts have established highly successful dropout prevention programs to keep students in school. With adequate funding, these dropout prevention programs can be replicated at other sites. For further information about successful dropout prevention programs, we recommend that the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University be contacted (800-443-6392).

Goal 2 of the National Education Goals states that "by the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent." With an overall completion rate of 86% for 18- to 24-year-olds in 1995 (again, note that this figure is based on a different population than those discussed earlier), we are almost there — and in fact, it should be acknowledged that it is probably not realistic to ever reach a graduation rate of 100% in this nation. However, careful attention and additional resources should be focused on raising the completion rate of Hispanic students in particular.

Why are Hispanic Dropout Rates so High?

As noted earlier, dropout rates for Hispanic students are much higher than those for other population subgroups. Hispanic students are more likely to live in poverty, and are more likely to attend disadvantaged schools where fewer resources are available to support at-risk students. These two factors undoubtedly contribute to the higher school dropout rate.

Two additional risk factors that contribute to the high dropout rates for Hispanic students are immigration status and English speaking ability. Again, census data indicate consistent increases in the number of immigrants from Spanish-speaking nations (for example, the total number of immigrants from Mexico rose from 637,000 during the 1970s to 1,653,000 during the 1980s). Immigrant and limited English proficient students often have a more difficult time in school because of the language barrier and other cultural differences. Additionally, many immigrants who migrate to the United States without a high school diploma never attended American schools, yet are erroneously classified as dropouts when in fact they were never part of the American educational system.

In addition to limited English speaking ability, many immigrant children arrive from countries where education is substandard compared to United States schools, thereby increasing their risk of later dropping out.

The Department of Education also reports that the length of time a Hispanic family has lived in the United States is strongly related to dropout rates, as rates are considerably lower for first and second generation Hispanic Americans, as compared to students born outside of the United

States (See Table 3 below for more information — note the high dropout rates of those Hispanics born outside the United States in the second line of the table).

Table 3
Dropout Rates among 16- to 24-year-olds: November 1989

(Percent)

Recency of Migration	Total	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
Total	13	31	10
Born outside 50 states and D.C.	29	43	8
First generation	10	17	6
Second generation or more	11	24	11

Source: Current Population Survey, 1989.

It is also important to note that treating the Hispanic population as one large, homogeneous group can be misleading. There are, in actuality, four major subgroups: Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and immigrants from Central and South America. Educational achievement and school completion does vary among these groups. For example, the dropout rate is quite high for Mexican Americans (36%) and Puerto Ricans (32%), but is considerably lower for Cubans (9%).

Although the findings regarding dropout rates are discouraging for Hispanic students, they also offer clear policy directions for educators regarding the need for special programs to support these students. At a time when Congress is proposing massive budget cuts in programs such as bilingual education, immigrant education, and Title 1, these data should indicate the desperate need for increases in funding.

Although the findings regarding dropout rates are discouraging for Hispanic students, they also offer clear policy directions for educators regarding the need for special programs to support these students.

College Completion Rates Also on the Rise

The number of Americans who complete a 4-year college degree also has risen consistently over time. In 1950, only 6% of high school graduates completed 4 years of college. Today, that percentage is up to 26% of high school graduates. This is a higher percentage than that found in other industrialized nations. Italy, for example, has a completion rate of only 7%.

In 1950, only 6% of high school graduates completed 4 years of college. Today, that percentage is up to 26% of high school graduates.

At the same time, the United States is widely recognized as having one of the largest — and best — systems of college education in the world. American colleges and universities train a large number of foreign students, particularly at the postgraduate level. (The quality of American universities also makes a positive statement about the quality of the nation's public elementary and secondary schools — their primary source of students).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of college and university graduates serves as a reliable indicator of the skill level of the young adult labor pool. Clearly, then, the United States has a highly skilled pool of workers.

The United States also has a very high percentage of high school graduates — second, in fact, only to Canada — who go on to 2-year institutions (primarily community and junior colleges). These institutions play a major role in both granting credentials for technical positions and in preparing students to move to a 4-year institution. In fact, according to data collected in 1990 by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, men (age 25-64 in this sample) who complete a 2-year degree or certificate earn more annually than those who begin work towards a 4-year degree but do not finish.

In the United States, more young women successfully complete higher education (23%) than in any other industrialized nation (for example, corresponding percentages for Japan and Germany are 12% and 11%, respectively).

Why is college graduation so important? Obtaining a 4-year college degree has a direct and positive effect on an individual's annual earnings. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "university education normally offers a substantial earnings advantage in comparison with upper secondary education" (p. 232).

Public Education and Employability

Given that nearly 3/4 of the nation's high school graduates in the workforce do not have a 4-year college degree, the public schools are essential in preparing students for the world of work. As mentioned earlier, there is a strong positive correlation between years of schooling and annual income (see Figure 2 at the end of this report). A more educated and higher wage-earning populace also may help stimulate the local economy by attracting and supporting local businesses and contributing more to public services.

Clearly, then, it is in the best interests of students to stay in school — and continue on to college. But what about the perceptions of employers? Do they see a link between school and employability?

According to a 1994 report by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), the number of years of schooling completed is positively correlated with a stronger work ethic. This means that employers should be encouraging workers — and prospective workers — to succeed in school. Yet once these students are in the workplace, employers offer very little training or schooling. OERI estimates that European and Japanese employers offer training or schooling to *three times* as many employees as American employers.

At the same time, the 1993 Sandia report (see Carson, Huelskamp, & Woodall) cites data indicating that employers are less interested in academic skills in their potential employees than they are in other workplace skills such as punctuality, ability to follow directions, commitment to the job, etc. A recent report by the National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce (NCEQW) found that employers rarely consider an applicant's academic record as a basis for hiring.

. . . employers are less interested in academic skills in their potential employees than they are in other workplace skills such as punctuality, ability to follow directions, commitment to the job, etc.

In fact, American employers spend very few employee training dollars on providing basic academic skills to employees. The Sandia report estimates that more than 90% of all training funds are spent on training activities other than basic skills training. (Other data sources indicate that employers spend most of their available training dollars on white collar workers).

The Sandia report estimates that more than 90% of all training funds are spent on training activities other than basic skills training.

It is unfortunately commonplace for American business leaders to bemoan the quality of our public schools, a trend that is clearly inconsistent with the data cited in this report indicating that businesses (a) spend very little on basic academic skills training (when it is actually needed) and (b) are not particularly interested in academic skills. At the July 1995 National Governors' Association annual meeting, for example, the chairman and CEO of IBM gave a speech where he erroneously stated that there had been "very little improvement" in the public school system since the publication of the report *A Nation at Risk.*

In general, however, employers report being happy with the quality of their employees. Data from a NCEQW survey indicate that employers reported that over 80% of their employees are "fully proficient" in their current positions.

Summary

The Trends are Good

- School completion rates are rising steadily. In 1991, nearly 86% of the population of 25- to 29-year-olds had completed at least 4 years of high school. It is a myth that more children are dropping out of school.
- Dropout rates declined steadily over the past several decades, especially for black students. Dropout rates for blacks declined from nearly 29% in 1967 to 13% in 1991.
- College completion rates in the United States are much higher than those in other industrialized nations.

Who Drops Out?

- Students from low-income families are far more likely to drop out of school.
- The dropout rate for Hispanic students remains unacceptably high. In fact, dropout rates for Hispanic students rose from 29% in 1975 to 35% in 1991, primarily due to rises in poverty and immigration.

Why Keep Students in School?

- There is a strong positive correlation between years of schooling and annual income. Therefore, local taxpayers have an interest in supporting high quality education programs as an investment in their local economy.
- It is much more cost-effective for taxpayers in the long run to keep students in school until they graduate.
- The failure to complete school is directly correlated with increased crime, welfare costs, and increasing public health care costs. Again, local taxpayers have a stake in supporting high quality education programs.

How You Can Use This Information

1. **Publish the positive facts about your public schools.** The facts show that more and more students are completing high school — and that translates into higher incomes and a stronger local economy. Write an article for a newsletter or other publication that shows your successes in raising school completion rates. Make sure to use school completion as the standard and include those students who get their GED. Consider citing some of the nationwide statistics provided in this publication on the importance of school completion and the rising number of high-school grads.

2. **Talk with the media at graduation time.** Use this information to generate positive press about your school district (including any dropout prevention efforts under way). Provide the media with a more accurate understanding of how dropout data are analyzed and describe the situation in your district (see Appendix A). It is particularly useful to describe a personal "success story" from your district. Don't wait until the media comes to you — take the initiative by talking with education reporters and editorial editors.

3. **Look at socioeconomic trends in your community,** and take any shifts or changes, such as increases in poverty rates, into account when explaining dropout and completion figures for your district.

4. **Describe and document dropout prevention programs in your district, as well as general improvements in your district** that are causing more students to complete school. Highlight these programs with the media and local political figures. Also, be prepared to discuss the potential reasons for students dropping out in your district, as well as the strategies being employed to keep students in school.

5. **Describe and document your overall school program, as well as specific strategies in your district** (particularly those for at-risk students such as pregnant teens), that have increased your school completion rates. Present the data in terms of the potential long-term economic gains and losses to your community.

6. **Talk to representatives from the local business community about programs they can be involved with to keep students in school.** These might include work/study programs, business-education partnerships, career awareness programs, and so on. Local businesses also should be encouraged to limit the number of hours that a full-time student can work (research indicates that working more than 20 hours per week will negatively affect academic performance, which in turn could affect your district's dropout rates).

7. **Develop outreach strategies that include social service agencies and other community groups** to help serve those students with needs that present barriers to school success and learning and increase the risk of dropping out.

8. **Keep this report handy!** Use the information in this report to help respond to questions from the community and the media. All too often schools are unfairly and erroneously painted in a negative light and successes are diminished. The information in this report can help you present a more accurate picture of school completion rates.

For Further Information, Please Contact
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References

For further information, you might want to look at the following:

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2. Carson, C.C., Huelskamp, R.M., & Woodall, T.D. *Perspectives on Education in America: An Annotated Briefing, April 1992.* Journal of Educational Research, May/June 1993, pps 86, 259-307.

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Table 2

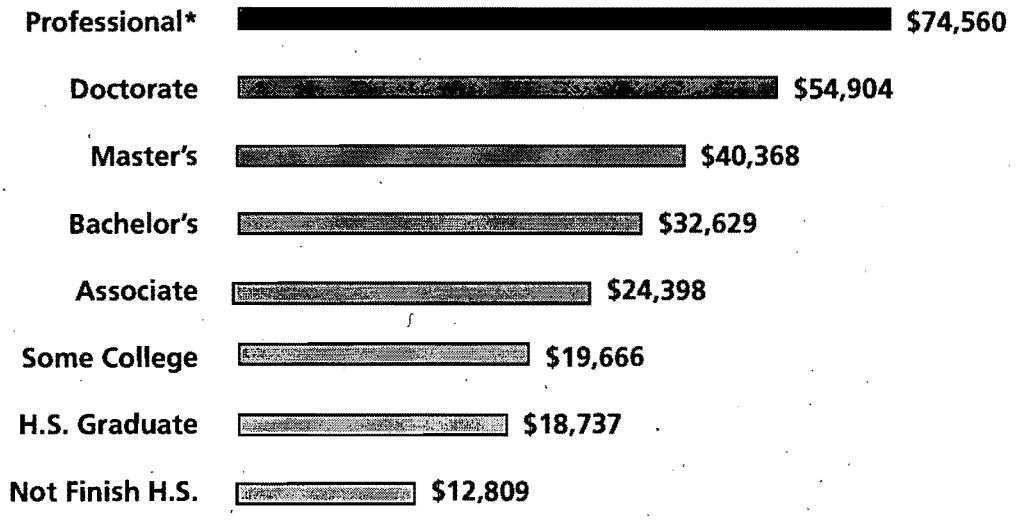
State School Completion Rates, 18- to 24-year-olds

State	1990 (%)	1993 (%)	State	1990 (%)	1993 (%)
Alabama	82	83	Montana	93	92
Alaska	89	90	Nebraska	91	96
Arizona	83	84	Nevada	83	83
Arkansas	87	88	New Hampshire	87	87
California	77	79	New Jersey	90	91
Colorado	88	88	New Mexico	85	84
Connecticut	90	93	New York	88	88
Delaware	86	94	North Carolina	83	85
District of Columbia	82	86	North Dakota	96	97
Florida	83	83	Ohio	89	90
Georgia	86	79	Oklahoma	87	83
Hawaii	93	91	Oregon	89	83
Idaho	83	87	Pennsylvania	90	90
Illinois	85	87	Rhode Island	87	91
Indiana	89	88	South Carolina	83	87
Iowa	95	94	South Dakota	88	93
Kansas	93	92	Tennessee	77	82
Kentucky	82	83	Texas	78	81
Louisiana	81	84	Utah	94	94
Maine	91	94	Vermont	86	90
Maryland	87	93	Virginia	87	89
Massachusetts	90	91	Washington	87	87
Michigan	86	89	West Virginia	83	86
Minnesota	92	93	Wisconsin	93	93
Mississippi	84	89	Wyoming	91	92
Missouri	88	90			

Source: National Education Goals Report, 1995 (Volume Two: State Data)

Figure 2

Average Annual Earnings by Level of Education 1992



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (1994)

*The Census Bureau defines the term "professional" as those positions requiring a specialized advanced degree (physicians, lawyers, etc.)

Appendix A

FOR LOCAL LEADERSHIP OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

SCHOOL BOARD NEWS

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION ■ A Service for National Affiliates ■ January 9, 1996 Vol. 16, No. 1

High school dropouts: the myth

On main street, it is conventional wisdom that school dropout rates are soaring. A quick glance at the facts reveals, however, that more students are earning high school and college degrees. School completion is a major success story that school boards should be trumpeting.

Here are the facts. Currently, about 88 percent of 25-year-olds have earned a high school diploma or its equivalent, such as a GED. More than one-fourth of high school graduates go on to receive a four-year college degree. This compares favorably to what public school critics refer to as education's "good old days" of the 1950s when only one-third of the adult population had completed high school and a scant 6 percent graduated from college.

Considering the 22 percent poverty rate among children and the rise of immigration, including many children with little or no education in their native language, this increase in the high school graduation rate is impressive.

Public schools have successfully nurtured students through the completion of their studies despite the formidable barriers that too many poor children face, such as inadequate parenting, health problems, language barriers, teen pregnancy, and the economic pressure on teenagers to work long hours.

School boards should be trumpeting their completion rates.

Furthermore, with more marginal students staying in school, one would expect overall student achievement to decline. We are pleased that it is not; student test scores are rising.

Although education systems differ among nations, school completion rates in the United States are higher than those of other industrialized nations, despite a child poverty rate that is more than twice that of most other nations.

NSBA encourages school boards to make their communities aware of their high school completion rate success to buoy confidence in their schools, as well as to attract community support to address the problems that still exist. For example, about one-third of all Hispanic students drop out of high school, a problem associated with poverty and language barriers. Without diminishing the overall success that has been made, this is clearly an area that must be addressed as a high priority.

The public also should understand the economics of school completion and the value of investing in their community's schools. Earnings for high school dropouts generally will not exceed the poverty level, and will be only about two-thirds that of high school graduates and about one-third the earnings of those who graduate from four-year colleges. Hence, school completion means more earning power throughout the community and a local work force that is competitive and attractive to business. By contrast, school dropouts are less likely to be employed (only 36 percent of dropouts ages 16-24 have jobs), more likely to be incarcerated (80 percent of all inmates are dropouts), three times more likely than high school graduates to be welfare recipients, and more likely to incur health care costs that are avoided by a better educated, higher earning population.

School board leaders should analyze their school completion data, including socioeconomic trends, to dispel the dropout myth with accurate information. The public also should become aware of the special efforts that local school systems have made and the importance of involving the business sector, social services agencies, and civic groups to help even more children complete school. ■

about NSBA...

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. NSBA achieves its mission by amplifying the influence of school boards across the country in all public forums relevant to federal and national education issues, by representing the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and by providing vital information and services to Federation Members and school boards throughout the nation.

NSBA advocates local school boards as the ultimate expression of the unique American institution of representative governance of public school districts. NSBA supports the capacity of each school board — acting on behalf of and in close concert with the people of its community — to envision the future of education in its community, to establish a structure and environment that allow all students to reach their maximum potential, to provide accountability for the people of its community on performance in the schools, and to serve as the key community advocate for children and youth and their public schools.

Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NSBA represents the nation's 95,000 school board members. These board members govern 15,025 local school districts that serve more than 40 million public school students — approximately 90 percent of all elementary and secondary school students in the nation. Virtually all school board members are elected; the remainder are appointed by elected officials.

NSBA policy is determined by a 150-member Delegate Assembly of local school board members from throughout the nation. The 24-member Board of Directors translates this policy into action. Programs and services are administered by the NSBA Executive Director, assisted by a professional staff. NSBA is located in metropolitan Washington, D.C.

NSBA Programs and Services

- **National Affiliate Program** — enables school boards to work with their state association and NSBA to identify and influence federal and national trends and issues affecting public school governance.
- **Council of Urban Boards of Education** — serves the governance needs of urban school boards.
- **Large District Forum** — serves the governance needs of large but non-urban boards.
- **Rural and Small District Forum** — serves the governance needs of rural and small enrollment districts.
- **Federal Relations Network** — school board members from each Congressional district actively participate in NSBA's federal and national advocacy efforts.
- **Federal Policy Coordinators Network** — focuses on the administration of federally funded programs.
- **Award Winning Publications** — ***The American School Board Journal***, ***The Executive Educator***, ***School Board News***, and special substantive reports on public school governance throughout the year.
- **Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education** and **Technology Leadership Network** — advances public education through best uses of technology in the classroom and school district operations.
- **Council of School Attorneys** — focuses on school law issues and services to school board attorneys.
- **Annual Conference and Exposition** — the nation's largest policy and training conference for local education officials on national and federal issues affecting the public schools in the United States.
- **National Education Policy Network** — provides the latest policy information nationwide and a framework for public governance through written policies.
- **Training/Development and Clearinghouse Information** — for the policy leadership of state school boards associations and local school boards.

·NSBA·

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Excellence and Equity in Public Education through School Board Leadership

National Reports

Release of 4th Grade TIMSS Data

On June 10, at 10 a.m. EST, the National Center for Education Statistics released the results from the 4th grade sample of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

The TIMSS research project looks at math and science learning, teaching, and achievement in a range of nations for students in the 4th, 8th, and 12th grades. The data described below focuses only on the 4th grade sample, with 26 countries participating.

You may recall that last November, the results from the 8th graders were released. Those findings showed that American 8th graders were above the international average in science achievement, but were below the international average in math achievement, with 41 countries participating. (Some nations, such as Germany, France, Italy, and the Soviet Union chose not to participate in the 4th grade testing).

In brief, the findings from the 4th graders indicate:

In both math and science achievement, U.S. 4th graders scored above the international average of all 26 countries.
In science achievement scores, only Korea scored statistically higher than the U.S. This means that we are very close to achieving the fifth National Education Goal (being first in the world in math and science).
In both math and science achievement, the U.S. was above 12 nations, with only Korea being above the U.S. in both math and science.
No "gender gap" was found for math achievement in the U.S., but was found for science.
In comparing this sample to that of the 1991 International Assessment of Educational Progress (IAEP), 4th graders are doing better in math.
The amount of homework assigned, the amount of TV watched, and the size of the classroom did not differentiate high and low achieving countries.
If we look at who makes up the top 10% of all students internationally, in math, 9% of this group would be from the U.S. In science, 16% would be from the U.S.

How do the findings from the 4th graders compare to the earlier findings

from the 8th grade sample?

> Clearly, in terms of our international standing, American 4th graders are stronger than American 8th graders. This implies that in the U.S. we might want to take a hard look at how math and science are taught during the middle school years.
> In fact, TIMSS researcher Bill Schmidt shows that in the realm of mathematics, a shift does occur during middle school in other nations. At this time, the notion of what constitutes "basic math skills" expands to include new and more sophisticated concepts in other nations. In the U.S., our idea of "basic math skills" remains constant. In other words, the U.S. education system has a static view of what is "basic" compared to that found in other nations.

Comments

If our 4th graders outperformed other nations in math, but our 8th graders did not, can it be said that, for grades 5-8, American education is deficient? Not necessarily, since our 4th graders today are performing better than they did in 1991. Thus, it is likely that school reform efforts in the U.S. have paid off in the form of higher achievement. We cannot assume this conclusively, though, until 1999 - when NCES will collect data on the current TIMSS 4th graders when they are in the 8th grade.

PRESS RELEASES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 21, 1999

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Education Sessions at NSBA Annual Conference Reflect Commitment to Student Achievement

More than 150 Clinics Seek to Revitalize School Board Governance

Alexandria, Va. – October 21, 1999 – The National School Boards Association will feature a wide variety of "Share the Success" and "Meet the Experts" clinics at its 60th Annual Conference in Orlando, FL, April 1-4, 2000. More than 150 clinic sessions will focus on school board governance issues, leadership tools and innovative programs aimed at raising student achievement.

Programs that focus on engaging the community to improve student achievement highlight the assortment of clinics assembled for the conference. These sessions explore how school districts establish academic standards, measure results, and define accountability as they develop programs to improve student performance. From dress code policies, to school reform initiatives, to integrating technology to boost student achievement, the clinic sessions will cover programs that benefit students of various abilities and backgrounds.

Scheduled clinics include:

- "Redefining School Leadership to Increase Student Achievement"
- "Generation Why: Teaching, Leading, and Connecting"
- "Partnering to Improve Performance for New Teachers"
- "Matching Systemic School Reform with 21st Century Challenges"
- "The Place for School Uniforms in the Dress Code Policy: A District Perspective"

In addition to the clinic sessions, the Conference features lectures from leading experts in education, such as The Institute for Educational Leadership, the Reading Recovery Council of North America, the National Science Foundation, and the American Psychological Association.

There will also be special workshops and hearings on hot education topics like Comprehensive School Reform Models, School-Business Partnerships and Labor-Management Relations. And the NSBA Exposition will feature thousands of the most up-to-date and cost-efficient school products.

The conference has also confirmed dynamic speakers for general sessions: Ret. General Colin Powell, NBC's Tom Brokaw, Former First Lady Barbara Bush and Bill Nye from "Disney Presents Bill Nye the Science Guy."

Complete Conference information is available on the NSBA Conference Web Site.

The National School Boards Association is a national advocacy organization representing the 95,000 local school board members who govern the nation's public schools. The organization's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education throughout the United States through local school board leadership.

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NSBA LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 30, 1999

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Top Companies to Exhibit at Technology + Learning Conference Start-Up Technology Firms Showcased

Alexandria, Va. – Sept. 29 – School leaders will examine the latest innovations in computer software, facilities management, staff development, and a host of other exhibits at the National School Boards Association's (NSBA) 13th Annual Technology + Learning Conference, November 10-13, in Dallas, TX.

Sponsored by the NSBA's ITTE: Education Technology Programs and cosponsored by more than 25 national education organizations, the three-day Technology + Learning Conference brings educators the latest ideas, solutions and innovations from school districts across the country. It also attracts leading Technology companies to the exhibit floor.

Companies slated to exhibit include Apple Computer, American Online, Compaq, Comp USA, Corel Corporation, Dell Computer Corporation, IBM Corporation, Intel Corporation, Lucent Technologies and Microsoft Corporation.

The exhibit hall is an integral part of the Technology + Learning Conference. It provides school district administrators with important buying information and product demonstrations. Attendees will meet with representatives from more than 380 education technology companies that are setting trends in K-12 education. Over 100 exhibitor workshops will be offered. Many of the workshops are presented jointly by educators and corporate representatives.

New to the exhibit hall this year is the Technology Incubator where nine start-up technology firms will be showcased in a special section. In addition to the Incubator companies, more than 100 other firms will be exhibiting at the T+L conference for the first time.

ITTE: Education Technology Programs was launched in 1985 by NSBA and its federation of state school boards associations to help advance the best uses of technology in public education.

For more information about the Conference, visit the Technology + Learning Web site at www.nsba.org/T+L.

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NSBA LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 25, 1999

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Ohio Voucher Ruling Should End Divisiveness, Says School Boards Association

Alexandria, Va. – August 25 – The Ohio voucher ruling should send a signal to public officials there and across the country to stop focusing on the divisive private school choice issue and concentrate instead on working together to improve public schools, according to the National School Boards Association (NSBA).

"We cannot allow the private school voucher issue to distract us from our mission to improve student achievement." said Mary Ellen Maxwell, NSBA president and a school board member from Moyock, North Carolina. "The rhetoric and litigation around vouchers serve only to steal time, money and attention away from solving the real issues that face public schools. Using public tax dollars to send a small number of students to private school will not help us repair school buildings, hire more teachers or add technology in classrooms."

The U.S. District Court in Ohio closed down a pilot tuition-voucher program for low- income families in Cleveland while considering a lawsuit challenging the program's constitutionality.

"The heart of the question is whether the Establishment Clause requires a subsidy to parent/guardians of children who attend religious schools. The first amendment does not require a public subsidy for religious education – it prohibits it," said Julie Underwood, NSBA general counsel. "The court's decision goes a long way toward shutting down the increasingly common attempts to siphon money from public schools to religious organizations."

If implemented nationally, a voucher system similar to the one ruled unconstitutional in Cleveland could shift as much as $14 billion in tax dollars to private schools. Such a shift would force states to raise taxes to recoup the lost revenue. In effect, taxpayers would be forced to subsidize parallel school systems.

"There are no easy answers to improving public schools. But, we need to invest in what we know works: reading programs, technology in the classroom, teacher training, and smaller class sizes in the early years," Maxwell said. "This is not the time for public officials to turn their backs on public schools. Let's face the issues and fix them for generations to come."

The Cleveland program is just one of several voucher programs across the country, including one in the state of Florida. However, the injunction by the federal district court in Ohio is the fourth court decision in the last four months that has ruled that religious school voucher programs are illegal.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 27, 1999

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Statement by Anne L. Bryant, Executive Director, National School Boards Association, on Funding the E-rate

Alexandria, Va. – May 27 – "We are thrilled with the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) vote today to fully fund the E-Rate for $2.25 billion next year. The E-rate program is vital for every community in this country and will ensure that no school or community is left behind in the information age.

"We know that by next year, 60 percent of jobs will require high-tech computer skills. Our schools and libraries must be connected to the Internet and technology-ready to properly prepare America's students. There has been an overwhelming response to the E-Rate over the past year by schools and libraries in not only every state, but in every type of community whether it be low-income, rural, urban, or suburban.

"With this additional funding, our schools will be able to better prepare children to succeed in the new high-tech job market and our libraries will be able to connect all Americans to the wealth of knowledge and skills on the Internet. But, this program is not just a fund for connecting kids to the Internet, this program will ensure that America's workforce of tomorrow has the skills it needs to compete and get ahead.

"The FCC's vote today shows the importance of the E-Rate in bridging the gap between wealthy and poor and urban and rural communities and school districts.

"We applaud the FCC for making a continued commitment to the future of America's children."

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 24, 1999

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Court Ruling Protects Children, School Districts

Alexandria, Va. – May 24 – Today's Supreme Court ruling in the case of Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education should benefit both students and school districts, according to the National School Boards Association.

"This ruling protects children from sexual harassment by other children without putting the school district at an excessive financial risk," said Anne Bryant, executive director of the National School Boards Association (NSBA). "School boards across the country have developed or are in the process of developing tough and clear sexual harassment policies that demonstrate that such action will not be tolerated. Today's Court ruling shows that if school officials implement these guidelines, children should not be vulnerable to harassment and schools, with limited public funding, should not be vulnerable to huge monetary damages."

In addition, Julie Underwood, NSBA general counsel, noted that the court ruling sets a very high standard for school districts in cases of sexual harassment of children by other children.

"The Court clarified potential liability for sexual harassment of students and employees. The Court stated that school districts will only be held liable if they were deliberately indifferent to known and pervasive harassment," Underwood said. "These are rare occasions."

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 21, 1999

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Statement by Anne L. Bryant Executive Director, National School Boards Association on the Tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado

Alexandria, Va. – April 21 – "We all have been greatly affected by the tragedy at Columbine High School. Our sympathy goes out to the entire community, which now has to cope with the magnitude of this horrible event.

This tragedy reinforces the need to ask why and how those teenagers got access to so much firepower and what may have motivated them to commit these crimes.

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) and the National Association of Attorneys General have addressed the escalating problem of youth violence occurring in our communities and schools by creating the Keep Schools Safe Web site. The Web site serves as a clearinghouse for concerned educators, parents and community leaders on how to reduce violence in America's schools.

For more information on school safety visit the Keep Schools Safe Web site at www.keepschoolssafe.org. NSBA's Web site also has resources to assist local school districts on response and preparedness issues."

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 16, 1999

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Foundation Report Urges Urban School Boards to Refocus Their Role

Alexandria, Va. - March 16 - Urban school boards must listen to what their communities value and expect from their schools, and then zero in on what matters most: improving the academic achievement of students, according to a new report issued today by the National School Boards Foundation.

The report, *Leadership Matters: Transforming Urban School Boards*, includes results of a national survey that shows that there is a consistent, significant difference in perception between urban school board members and the urban public in several key areas, including the overall success of urban public schools.

"This report signals a call to action for all of us who care deeply about urban education. It sends a clear message that it is time for all urban school boards to focus like a laser beam on improving student achievement and on engaging the community," said Michael Preston, Board Member, Seattle School District #1 and chairman of the National School Boards Association's Council of Urban Boards of Education.

The report, which resulted from the National School Boards Foundation's year long Urban School Boards Initiative that included a national Roundtable with education experts from around the country, calls for a focused agenda in four areas:

- **Higher academic expectations, more resources and stronger accountability.** High expectations for academic achievement for all students must be clearly articulated and must be backed by resources, authority and accountability.
- **Active parent and public involvement.** Parents and other members of the public must be actively involved as partners and allies in the process of public education. This means boards need to be more like team leaders with the courage to invite others to the table and the skills to involve them constructively.
- **Quality teachers.** Top-quality education depends on high-quality teachers - and urban school boards must focus on attracting and keeping teachers who know their subject matter and how to teach it.
- **Safe learning environments.** School boards must make sure that all students attend schools that are safe and orderly and where diversity is respected and valued. This is the area of the largest gap between the public and board members' perceptions.

"Our belief that issues facing urban schools today will eventually face all schools, is what led the National School Boards Foundation to address these issues of urban school governance," said Anne Bryant, executive director of the National School Boards Association, and a trustee of the National School Boards Foundation.

"The ultimate objective of this project is to provide urban board members – who make policy affecting 12 million students - with a clear understanding of these issues and with the tools and supports they need to improve their effectiveness," said Terry Crane, chairman of the National School Boards Foundation and president of Jostens Learning Corporation.

The public opinion research found significant differences in perception between board members and the public including:

- Urban board members gave schools much higher performance ratings than did their constituencies. For example, less than half (49 percent) of the urban public believe schools do a good or excellent job teaching reading, writing and math, compared to 69 percent of school board members.

- Just 39 percent of urban residents believe schools do a good or excellent job involving parents in education, compared to 51 percent of school board members. Forty-one percent of residents believe schools do a good or excellent job hiring and keeping high-quality teachers, compared to 63 percent of school board members.

- Thirty-three percent of residents believe schools do a good or excellent job keeping violence and drugs out of schools, compared to 82 percent of school board members.

"School boards play a unique leadership role in our democracy," said Lynwood Battle, president of the Cincinnati Board of Education. "Board members are elected officials who are part of the community they serve. One of the clear findings of this research is that school boards must redouble their efforts to work closely with their own communities to set a common vision for their schools and to work together to achieve that vision."

"If urban school board members respond to these recommendations and recast their role to become team leaders focusing on student achievement, urban school students will benefit greatly," said Crane. "The Foundation is lining up partners to launch a variety of projects to respond to these recommendations."

The Urban School Boards Initiative project was underwritten by the BellSouth Foundation, The Ford Foundation, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Motorola Foundation. The project was carried out in cooperation with the National School Boards Association's Council of Urban Boards of Education.

The National School Boards Foundation's innovative projects encourage and prepare local school boards to become catalysts for education change and agents for systemic reform in the public schools so that all students will be prepared to meet the challenges of

tomorrow. The Foundation was launched in 1995 by the National School Boards Association. NSBA is a national advocacy organization representing the 95,000 local school board members who govern the nation's public schools.

Copies of the report are available by calling 800-706-6722 (order #10-001) and are available along with the project survey instruments from the National School Boards Foundation online at www.nsbf.org.

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LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 20, 1999

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Statement by Anne L. Bryant Executive Director, National School Boards Association on President Clinton's State of the Union Address

Alexandria, Va. – January 20, 1999 – "We welcome President Clinton's comments about accountability measures designed to hold students, teachers and schools to high standards.

"We stand at an historic pivot point. We have the opportunity to raise student achievement for every student in every school district. The President's proposals are attractive, coherent and seem to be focused on the children who need help the most.

"The real substance of the proposals, however, is in the details and the execution. If local school districts see real support from the White House for raising academic achievement, they will be energized. If they see only a token investment with greater negative consequences, local school districts will be less likely to be supportive.

"It is critically important that the Administration and Congress take steps to give local school districts the flexibility to develop their own vision and their own plan for raising the academic achievement of their own children. Every community must have the freedom to develop their own indicators of success.

"Equally important is the fact that Congress and the Administration must back up efforts to improve accountability by delivering more resources for core education programs. We need to make sure that students are learning more - in measurable terms - of the skills and subject matter they will need to make their way in a changing world."

The National School Boards Association is a national advocacy organization representing the 95,000 local school board members who govern the nation's public schools. The organization's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education throughout the Unites States through local school board leadership.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 4, 1999

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New Partnership Introduces EDvancenet Resources
Valuable Tools to Guide Policy Decisions

Alexandria, Va. – January 4 – The Consortium for School Networking (CoSN), the National School Boards Foundation, and MCI WorldCom have formed EDvancenet, a new partnership that has created tools to address education technology in the context of major policy issues. The *Leader's Guide to Education Technology*, presentation materials, and the EDvancenet Web site are now available. These tools are designed to help policymakers and school leaders ask the right questions to ensure that technology supports – and helps achieve – educational goals.

EDvancenet is committed to improving teaching and learning in the nation's schools with technology. By providing resources for policymakers and school leaders and creating a network of knowledgeable decision makers, EDvancenet strives to ensure that our national investment in education technology enables students to succeed in the new age of information technology.

"EDvancenet is committed to helping policymakers and school leaders make sound decisions about technology's use in schools," said Robin Kaczka, manager of EDvancenet. "CoSN, the National School Boards Foundation, and MCI WorldCom came together for this project because of our belief that state and local policymakers don't have to become technology experts to make intelligent decisions, but they do need information and resources to help them ask the right questions so that technology is used to support educational goals."

Around the nation, decision makers are embracing the EDvancenet tools. "The EDvancenet materials are a valuable addition to presentations before local school board members in Massachusetts," said Michael Gilbert, technology director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees. "With these resources, I'm able to effectively convey both the benefits and challenges of using technology in schools."

And in New Mexico, Kurt Steinhaus, EDvancenet advisor and assistant superintendent in the New Mexico Department of Education reports, "School administrators are telling me, 'These EDvancenet resources are great! Finally someone prepared a set of tools that address technology in the context of our major policy issues.'"

Copies of the EDvancenet Tools are available via the EDvancenet Web site at www.edvancenet.org. Additional tools with up-to-date information are scheduled for release in Spring 1999. For additional information, contact Robin Kaczka, EDvancenet Manager, at 703-838-6200 or at rkaczka@nsba.org

The Consortium for School Networking is a broad-based membership organization that advocates the use of telecommunications in K-12 classrooms to improve learning. CoSN members include school districts, state education agencies, national education agencies, and private organizations.

The National School Boards Foundation was established in 1995 to identify new solutions and approaches to the most pressing challenges facing the nation's schools and their boards. The National School Boards Foundation is dedicated to preparing school board members to be catalysts for systemic reform in the public schools.

MCI WorldCom is dedicated to broadening the education of America's children and families with cutting-edge technology. MCI WorldCom has formed partnerships with national organizations to help facilitate and support the effective integration of technology in the classroom. Through the MCI WorldCom Foundation, MCI WorldCom has provided the funding to administer the EDvancenet project.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 8, 1998

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New Guide Helps Education Leaders Incorporate Technology in School Design

Alexandria, Va. – December 8 – The National School Boards Association (NSBA) today introduced its latest in a series of technology focused publications. *Technology & School Design: Creating Spaces for Learning* is a manual designed to guide school leaders through school facility and technology systems planning.

Written by leading architects, engineers, educational consultants, and school practitioners, *Technology & School Design* advises school leaders on the importance of planning where and how technology will fit into building plans. It also offers a model for long-range facility planning, tells how to select and work with an architectural firm, describes technology-rich school spaces and infrastructure options, and advises how to develop consensus and manage a bond issue campaign to raise funds.

"Students need school buildings that enable teachers and technology to operate at peak performance," said Anne Bryant, NSBA executive director. "This publication lays the valuable foundation to create effective spaces for learning that will ultimately improve student achievement."

The guide emphasizes that flexibility and collaboration are the key elements of modern school design. A flexible design that accommodates future technology additions ensures worthwhile facility investments. Mobilizing a planning group with representation from all stakeholder groups helps with winning community support.

The guide is a product of NSBA's Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education (ITTE). ITTE was launched in 1985 by NSBA and its federation of state school boards associations to help advance the best uses of technology in public education.

Technology & School Design: Creating Spaces for Learning (softcover, 122 pages) is available for $35 by calling the NSBA Distribution Center at (800) 706-6722. For more information on this and other NSBA technology-focused publications, visit the ITTE Web site at www.nsba.org/itte. (Click on "ITTE Publications.")

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LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 11, 1998

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School Districts Should Not be Financially Responsible For Peer Sexual Harassment

National School Boards Association Files Friend of the Court Brief in

Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education

Alexandria, Va. – December 11 – The National School Boards Association (NSBA), joined by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, American Association of School Administrators and the Georgia School Boards Association, filed an *amicus brief* this week in the case of *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*. The case involves a Georgia girl, seeking $500,000, who claims the school district failed to stop sexual harassment by a classmate after she had informed a teacher of the behavior.

"School districts recognize that sexual harassment is a problem and have addressed this problem through the enactment of policies, implementation of reporting procedures and most importantly by engaging in training sessions designed to prevent sexual harassment, said Anne Bryant, Executive Director of the National School Boards Association.

"We must continue to work to develop a respectful learning environment in our public schools. The award of damages to an individual under Title IX is not a logical solution to the problem of peer harassment. Rather than eliminating inappropriate conduct, a damage award would only divert money away from the programs and efforts designed to help schools tackle this issue," Bryant said.

NSBA explained that Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was designed by Congress to prevent sex discrimination in school districts. The desire was to prohibit intentional gender discrimination in "any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." Schools should not be held financially liable for peer sexual harassment unless the school has discriminated against the student.

In short, NSBA argues that a plaintiff suing a school district for peer harassment would need to prove that the school district purposefully discriminated against him or her, or that the district failed to respond appropriately because of the student's gender. Only then would a school district be in violation of Title IX.

"Title IX is a discrimination statute – not a minimum school disciplinary code. When a school responds to student behavior it makes everyone unhappy. Student offenders view their punishment as too strict and student complainants view the offender's punishment as too lax. This is a real school discipline issue – but not a Title IX

issue," said Julie Underwood, General Counsel of the National School Boards Association, who prepared the brief.

"Congress did not pass Title IX to review student disciplinary actions in schools. Title IX is implicated if, and only if, the student discipline is administered in a manner that discriminates on the basis of gender," she said.

Oral arguments are scheduled for January 12, 1998. The U.S. Supreme Court will likely render a decision on this case this spring.

The National School Boards Association is a national advocacy organization representing the 95,000 school board members who govern the nation's public schools. The organization's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education through local school board leadership.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 23, 1998

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E-Rate is the 1990s Version of GI Bill

Statement by Anne L. Bryant
Executive Director, National School Boards Association

Alexandria, VA – November 23, 1998 – The following is a statement by Anne L. Bryant, executive director of the National School Boards Association, on the announcement today that up to 47,000 schools and libraries will receive funds to connect children to the Internet.

"Today signifies blast-off day on the information superhighway and we are not talking about a single space shuttle – we are talking about reaching millions of children with the tools to raise student achievement. Technology, acquired with thoughtful planing and delivered through professionally trained teachers and staff, is the key to higher order learning for all students.

"The E-rate program is the GI Bill of the 90's. Students need access to the Internet now so they can learn more as they conduct research, do science projects and solve mathematical equations. Schools need to tap in to the information age so they can keep up with rapidly changing world. A web site has replaced the Dick and Jane reader.

"Access to telecommunications services is not a luxury; it's a new basic. The E-rate process has taken place quickly, despite facing difficult challenges on the Hill and in the telecommunications industry. This is a startup operation that would rival anything in Silicon Valley. We began in September, 1997 and now only 15 months and 30,000 applications, later we have nearly $2 billion for schools and libraries to connect to the Internet."

NSBA is the nationwide advocacy organization representing the 95,000 local school boards members who govern the nation's public schools. The organization's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education throughout the United States through local school board leadership.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 9, 1998

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Supreme Court Action
No 'Green Light' on Vouchers

School Boards Association Calls *Jackson v. Benson* Legal Draw

Statement by Anne L. Bryant
Executive Director, National School Boards Association
on Supreme Court Denial of *Jackson v. Benson* for Review

"Today the U.S. Supreme Court denied *Jackson v. Benson* for review. The Supreme Court's denial means the voucher program will continue in the state of Wisconsin because the Wisconsin Supreme Court found it constitutional under the Wisconsin Constitution. However, today's court decision does not mean that the Supreme Court believes the program is constitutional under the federal constitution. It just means they chose not to review it - they have that prerogative.

"In this case the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association challenged the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, which permits students to use state funded tuition vouchers for private sectarian schools. The teachers' association said the program was a violation of the Establishment Clause, which guarantees separation of church and state.

"This denial sets no precedent outside the state of Wisconsin. The legislatures in other states should not rely on today's Supreme Court action as a green light for vouchers. In other states, state courts could determine that a similar voucher program is unconstitutional under their state constitution – or the Supreme Court could choose to review a similar program later and actually find it unconstitutional. Today's ruling is not a win, or loss; it is a legal draw.

"NSBA will respond by redoubling our efforts to fight vouchers at the state level and to work with the incoming Congress to educate them on the value of the nation's public schools. The voucher debate is divisive and distracts Congress from focusing its attention on education programs that benefit the vast majority of public school students."

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Background Information

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) permits up to 15%

of the Milwaukee public school population to attend private nonsectarian schools within the city with the state paying the tuition costs. For each student enrolled under the program, the state proportionately reduces the aid Milwaukee public schools receive.

In 1995, the Wisconsin State Legislature amended the MPCP to include sectarian private schools. Sectarian schools had to agree under the "opt out" provision not to *require* any program student to participate in any religious training, indoctrination or education. Tuition payments are made out to the parent or guardian, but sent to the school where the parent/guardian has to "restrictively endorse" the check to the private school.

Up to approximately 15,000 students would be allowed to transfer to eligible private schools. This number of students exceeds the total student population of all but 5 of Wisconsin's 427 school districts. Stated another way, the total number of students who would be eligible to participate in the program exceeds the student population of approximately 99% of Wisconsin's public school districts.

Currently three states have Tuition Tax Credit program:

Arizona	Iowa	Minnesota

Twelve states have considered, but rejected voucher proposals in the last three years:

Delaware	Illinois	Mississippi	New Jersey
Florida	Kentucky	Missouri	Oklahoma
Georgia	Maryland	New Hampshire	Oregon

Eight states have litigation pending on tuition vouchers:

Colorado	Ohio	Vermont
Maine	Pennsylvania	Wisconsin
Massachusetts	Texas	

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