



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress

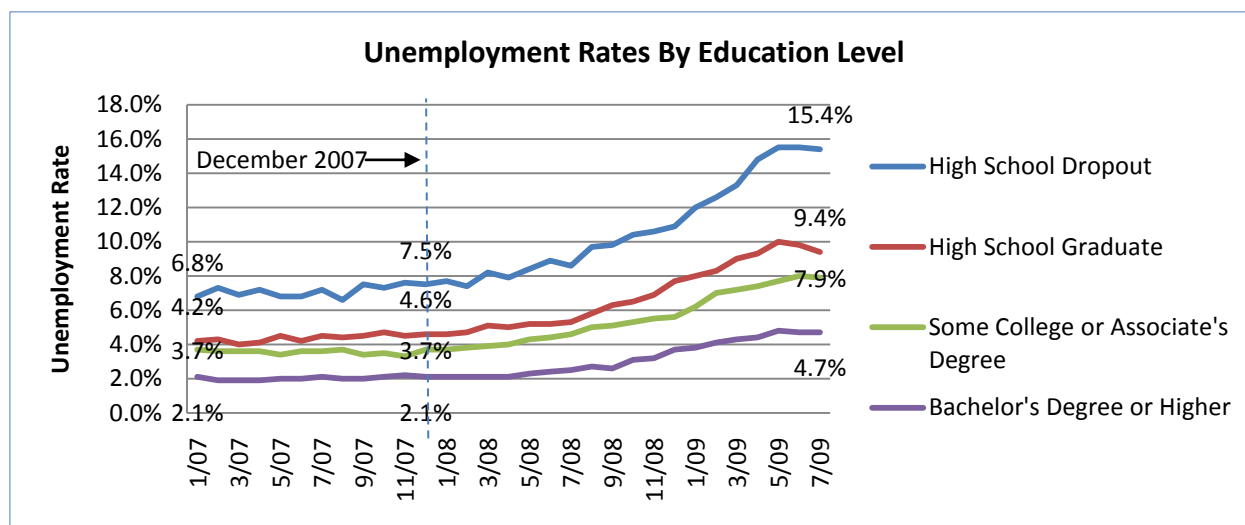


THE HIGH COST OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS: New Alliance Brief Says Dropouts from the Class of 2009 Represent \$335 Billion in Lost Income

If the high school students who dropped out of the Class of 2009 had graduated, the nation's economy would have benefited from nearly \$335 billion in additional income over the course of their lifetimes. So says *The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools*, a new issue brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education.

“As these findings show, the best economic stimulus is a high school diploma,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Given the state of high schools in the United States, it is imperative that the nation focus attention on students most at risk of dropping out if it is to achieve long-term economic stability. In an Information Age economy, education is the main currency.”

Not only do high school dropouts earn less when they are employed, but they are also much more likely to be unemployed during the current economic recession, the brief finds. As shown in the graph below, the unemployment rate for individuals of all education levels has skyrocketed since the recession began in December 2007, but high school dropouts have faced the most difficulty in finding a job. In July 2009, the unemployment rate for high school dropouts was 15.4 percent, compared to 9.4 percent for high school graduates, 7.9 percent for individuals with some college credits or an associate's degree, and 4.7 percent for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Table A-4: Employment Status of the Civilian Population 25 Years and Over by Educational Attainment, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t04.htm> (accessed August 10, 2009).

Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the brief notes that the average annual income for a high school dropout in 2005 was \$17,299, compared to \$26,933 for a high school graduate, a difference of \$9,634. The impact on the country's economy is less visible, but as the brief demonstrates, cumulatively its effect is staggering.

"The results speak clearly," Wise said. "In this economy, being without a high school diploma is two strikes—you are more likely to make less, and if you have a job, you are more likely to be laid off from it."

More than seven thousand students become dropouts every school day. Annually, that adds up to almost 1.3 million students who will not graduate from high school with their peers as scheduled. According to the brief, if high schools are unable to graduate their students at higher rates, nearly 13 million students will drop out over the next decade. The result will be a loss to the nation of *\$3 trillion*.

On the other hand, everyone benefits from increased high school graduation rates, the brief argues. Graduates themselves, on average, will earn higher wages and enjoy more comfortable and secure lifestyles. They live longer, are less likely to be teen parents, and are less likely to commit crimes, rely on government health care, or use other public services such as food stamps or housing assistance. At the same time, the nation benefits from graduates' increased purchasing power, collects higher tax receipts, and sees higher levels of worker productivity.

"From the implementation of the stimulus bill, to the federal budget and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Congress has several opportunities to fix the nation's high schools," Wise said. "I urge quick congressional action to address the high school dropout crisis and ensure that more students graduate from high school prepared for college and career."

The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/HighCost.pdf>. It was originally published in 2007 with support from MetLife Foundation.



FREE FALLIN': United States Falls to Number Two in World Competitiveness Rankings, Number Thirty-Six in Health and Primary Education

After several years at the top of the rankings, the United States has fallen to second place behind Switzerland in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) competitiveness rankings, according to *The Global Competitiveness Report 2009-2010*, which was released on September 8.

Each year, the WEF issues the report to shed light on the key factors that determine economic growth and to explain why some countries are more successful than others in raising income levels and opportunities for their populations. It also includes comprehensive listings of the main strengths and weaknesses of countries, making it possible to identify key priorities for policy

reform. A key feature of the report is the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), which ranks 133 countries based on twelve pillars of competitiveness that are grouped into twelve categories.¹

The WEF attributes Switzerland's rise to the top to its relatively stable performance. In contrast, the United States has seen a weakening across a number of areas, most notably in its financial market sophistication, which fell from ninth to twentieth, and macroeconomic stability, which fell to ninety-three from sixty-six. The report notes that the decline in these two factors is not surprising considering that the financial crisis "originated in large part" in the United States.

With the exception of macroeconomic stability, the United States received its lowest ranking for health and primary education, which fell from thirty-fourth to thirty-sixth. Within that category, the United States fares poorly in several health issues, including HIV prevalence (eighty-fifth) and infant mortality (thirtieth). It also receives low marks for the quality of its education expenditure (forty-fifth) and primary education (thirtieth).

As governments from around the world look to cut spending to reduce the public debt brought about by stimulus spending, the report argues that it will be "essential to avoid significant reductions in revenue allocation" to health and public education.

U.S. Rankings in Each of the Twelve Categories of the GCI

Institutions: **34**
Infrastructure: **8**
Macroeconomic Stability: **93**
Health and Primary Education: **36**
Higher Education and Training: **7**
Goods Market Efficiency: **12**
Labor Market Efficiency: **3**
Financial Market Sophistication: **20**
Technological Readiness: **13**
Market Size: **1**
Business Sophistication: **5**
Innovation: **1**

The United States fares much better in higher education and training, ranking seventh overall behind Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Singapore, and Switzerland. But even within this category, the United States receives poor rankings in quality of math and science education (forty-eighth) secondary enrollment (forty-third), and quality of the education system (twenty-second).

"Quality higher education and training is crucial for economies that want to move up the value chain beyond simple production processes and products," the report reads. "In particular, today's globalizing economy requires economies to nurture pools of well-educated workers who are able to adapt rapidly to their changing environment."

The report also includes the results of an opinion survey of business executives on the most problematic factors for doing business in their country. For the United States, respondents ranked access to financing (19 percent), tax rates (14.1 percent), and tax regulations (12.8 percent) in the top three. Of the fifteen answers, poor work ethic in the national labor force (7 percent) ranked sixth while an inadequately educated workforce (5.6 percent) was seventh.

Due in no small part to the worldwide economic recession, the report finds a measurable decline from last year in the average GCI score for the top ten countries, dropping from 5.51 (out of 7.00) to 5.45 this year, as seen in the table below.

¹ The WEF groups these factors into twelve categories: institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic stability, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labor market efficiency, financial market sophistication, technological readiness, market size, business sophistication, and innovation.

The Top Ten: Global Competitiveness Index 2009–10 Rankings

Country	GCI Rank (2009–10)	GCI Score (2009–10)		GCI Rank (2008–09)	CGI Score (2008–09)
Switzerland	1	5.60		2	5.61
United States	2	5.59		1	5.74
Singapore	3	5.55		5	5.53
Sweden	4	5.51		4	5.53
Denmark	5	5.48		3	5.58
Finland	6	5.43		6	5.50
Germany	7	5.37		7	5.46
Japan	8	5.37		9	5.38
Canada	9	5.33		10	5.37
Netherlands	10	5.32		8	5.41

“The strong interdependence among the world’s economies makes this a truly global economic crisis in every sense,” said **Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum**. “Policy-makers are presently struggling with ways of managing these new economic challenges, while preparing their economies to perform well in a future economic landscape characterized by growing uncertainty. In a difficult global economic environment, it is more important than ever for countries to put into place strong fundamentals underpinning economic growth and development.”

Moving up two spots in the rankings to number three is Singapore, which the report credited for its efficiency of goods and labor markets (first), financial market sophistication (second), world-class infrastructure (fourth), and strong focus on education which provides highly skilled individuals for the workforce. Further down the rankings, the United Kingdom falls to thirteen on the continued weakening of its financial markets. China, at twenty-nine, continues to lead large developing economies, while India (forty-ninth) and Brazil (fifty-sixth) continue to improve.

Download the complete report at

<http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Global%20Competitiveness%20Report/index.htm>.



ACHIEVING A WEALTH OF RICHES: New Alliance Brief Examines How Teachers Can Use Data to Transform Teaching and Learning

Too many teachers are “data rich but information poor,” meaning that while student data is becoming more abundant, not enough teachers have access to training, support, and the structures needed to use data effectively. So says *Achieving a Wealth of Riches: Delivering on the Promise of Data to Transform Teaching and Learning*, a new policy brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education, which was released on August 13 and made possible through generous support from the MetLife Foundation.

“Simply putting someone on a fire truck and giving him a water hose does not mean that he can put out a fire,” said Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, “and merely providing teachers with more data does not ensure that they know how to use data to improve student learning.”

According to the brief, expectations for teachers have changed dramatically over the past several years. The enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act and recent federal investments in Statewide Data Systems mean that many teachers now have access to a wealth of data on how their students are performing. Along with this new influx of data come new responsibilities as teachers are being asked to go beyond traditional roles and embrace the use of data to improve their teaching and students' learning.

There is a growing understanding that data is critical to ensuring that students are graduating from high school both college and career ready, the brief argues. Whereas some teachers in the past may have used data from classroom quizzes and tests to determine whether their students have learned the material, teachers are now expected to use multiple sources of information, including students' daily work, surveys detailing students' background information, end-of-course exams, and state-mandated tests to inform their instruction. Without proper training, teachers may not understand the data they receive or how to use it; even worse, they may inaccurately translate data and modify their instructional strategies with unintended consequences.

"Few teachers, especially those who have been in the classroom for several years, have been taught assessment or data literacy skills in their teacher preparation courses," Wise said. "Therefore it is critical that schools, districts, states, and the federal government promote effective professional development to help build teachers' abilities in these areas."

To help teachers better understand and use data, *Achieving a Wealth of Riches* calls for providing teachers with "assessment literacy skills" to help them create valid and reliable assessments, embed assessment practices in instruction, and use multiple kinds of assessment data to make informed decisions about instruction. In addition, the brief says that teachers also need "data literacy skills" to access, convert, and manipulate data in order to make informed decisions in the classroom.

The brief suggests particular roles that schools, districts, and states should play in making every classroom data-driven and outlines federal actions that can positively support teachers' use of data to improve student achievement. Specific recommendations are as follows:

- Provide incentives for states to adopt and implement common standards.
- Ensure that summative assessments are aligned with the state-led common standards effort.
- Support pre-service and in-service training for teachers to use data to improve student achievement.
- Support innovative school structures that allow for data use in the classroom.
- Invest in research.

Achieving a Wealth of Riches: Delivering on the Promise of Data to Transform Teaching and Learning is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/AchievingWealthOfRiches.pdf>.

The brief was released at an event featuring nearly 150 educators, policymakers, and other key stakeholders gathered in Washington, DC. Speakers at the event included **Kati Delahanty, a teacher at Charlestown High School in Massachusetts; Norah Lycknell, a former resident principal at Eliot-Hine Middle School in Washington, DC; Leslie W. Grant, a visiting**

assistant professor at the College of William & Mary; and Joe Aguerrebere, president and CEO of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. Video and other materials from the event are available at <http://www.all4ed.org/events/081309TeachersUseOfData>.



INTERNATIONAL LESSONS ABOUT NATIONAL STANDARDS: New Report Calls for an Independent Organization to Lead U.S. Standards Effort

International Lessons about National Standards, a report from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, takes a look at two pressing education issues—international benchmarking and common national standards—and explains why the first issue can greatly inform the second. It examines lessons learned from other countries that have implemented common standards and concludes that the Common Core State Standards Initiative is in line with most of these lessons. The sole exception is the lack of an independent, leading organizational structure to oversee and sustain the U.S. standards movement.

The report observes ten countries (Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, the Netherlands, Russia, Singapore, and South Korea) in an effort to help the United States avoid similar mistakes in its move toward common standards while identifying successful strategies and solutions. The authors note that the lessons from Germany are particularly insightful because the nation recently embarked on a standards movement very similar to the United States. In total, the report provides six main findings:

- It's not true that national standards signify a loss of local control.
- An independent, quasi-governmental institution is needed to oversee the development of national standards and assessments and to produce trustworthy reports to the nation.
- The federal government should encourage and provide resources for the standards-setting process but shouldn't meddle inappropriately.
- We should develop coherent, focused, rigorous standards beginning with English, math, and science.
- National assessments (including open-ended questions) should be administered at grades 4, 8, and 12 every two years.
- Hold students, teachers, and schools accountable for performance.

These findings inform several recommendations for moving forward with the Common Core State Standards Initiative, a movement supported by the Obama administration and led by the Council of Chief School Officers and the National Governors Association. According to the report, the “one glaring hole” in the current Common Core strategy is the failure to address the second finding: an independent, partly governmental organizational structure in charge of setting and revising the standards and developing an ongoing assessment based system. All of the countries surveyed have a comparable institution in place and agree reliable results cannot be fairly reported without it.

The report maintains that having an institution in place is necessary to ensure that assessments are being properly administered and fully funded and that test results are being used for international comparison and to inform teaching methods. In the foreword to the report, **Chester E. Finn, Jr., Michael J. Petrilli, and Amber M. Winkler** call for a “major act of organizational creativity, not unlike—in various eras—inventing the Postal Service, Pension Office, National

Academy of Science ... and National Institute of Standards and Technology.” Or as an alternative solution, they suggest delegating the “solemn responsibility to some existing and durable entity that doesn’t presently have the responsibility.” They offer the National Assessment Governing Board as one possibility but acknowledge that it has both pluses and minuses.

Whether it is inventing a new organization or granting the responsibility to an already existing one, the federal government itself should not set the standards, the report emphasizes. The report’s authors, **William H. Schmidt, Richard Houang, and Sharif Shakrani**, strive to negate the perceived misconception that adopting national standards means lesser state control. The takeaway from the countries observed is, “national standards are not—at least, need not be—developed in isolation by a distant central government that runs the education system and quashes local control.”

In addition to the challenges highlighted in this report, the Common Core State Standards Initiative has come under fire from various other critics. Opponents worry common standards will force students and teachers to focus too much on standardized testing while discouraging innovation and stifling creativity. However, in a [recent interview on CBS’s *Face the Nation*](#), **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**, a proponent of the effort, explained the standards movement as “being led exactly at the right place, at the local level” and goes on to say national standards are “absolutely the right thing to do for our nation’s children and for our nation’s long-term economic competitiveness.”

Registration Now Open for National Career Academy Coalition’s Annual Conference

Forty years ago, the first career academy opened its doors at Edison High School in Philadelphia. Today, there are thousands of career academies throughout the country. From November 1 to 3, the National Career Academy Coalition (NCAC) will return to Philadelphia to hold its annual conference, “Honoring the History, Securing the Future,” at the Loews Philadelphia Hotel.

National Career Academy Coalition’s mission is to create and support a national network of existing and emerging career academies. Its annual conference is designed to provide opportunities for dialogue, exploration, and networking so that K–12 educators, representatives from higher education, business, and government, among others, can move academies and smaller learning communities to the highest level.

NCAC is partnering for this conference with the Alliance for Excellent Education and nearly thirty other national organizations that support career academies. The conference will feature more than seventy high-quality sessions organized around the ten National Standards of Practice (NSOP), as well as opportunities to learn from academy experts in roundtable settings and engage in conversation with colleagues and industry experts from around the country.

More information, including registration instructions and an agenda, is available at <http://ow.ly/p1IY>.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America’s six million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.