

Problems with education in america

[Profession](#), [Teacher](#)



Many people believe that there is a crisis in the educational system in America right now. People are especially worried about the low scores that high school seniors recently received after taking an international placement test. The U. S. was ranked very low in comparison to forty other industrialized nations. Because of this, a large group of politicians and educators want to increase the standards expected by high schools for their students. However, there are several reasons why this sort of change would be difficult for schools to accomplish. There is some question about whether or not these test scores truly reflect the mathematical abilities of today's students. Two of the bigger problems expected originate from the issues of public school funding and child poverty, although there are several other factors contributing to the problem. The tests are taken by fourth graders, eighth graders, and twelfth graders. The children in the lower grades scored higher nationally within their respective test levels than the high school students, but the scores were still fairly low. Students were tested in four subjects: general mathematics, general science, advanced mathematics, and physics. In general mathematics, " American 12th graders did better than those in only two countries, Cyprus and South Africa" (Times 1998: 2). In physics and advanced mathematics, " no country performed more poorly" (Times 1998: 2). Because the fourth and eighth graders did better on the tests, " experts argued that American pupils start out ahead of their foreign peers in elementary school but as they move through middle and high school are challenged less and less because the curriculum tends to be repetitive" (Times 1998: 3). In an attempt to raise the overall average math and science scores of U. S. seniors, certain authorities want to initiate a new set of higher

standards in these subject areas. They believe that the trouble stems from poorly trained teachers who do not understand or care about their jobs (Times 1998: 1). This is not the case. The real issues are out of the control of educators. One example of these issues is poor school funding. The majority of public schools receive funding locally from property tax; therefore, students who live in wealthier neighborhoods will have access to schools with higher funding because the tax payers in that area will have more to give. On the other hand, students who live in poor, impoverished communities will not have the benefits that more affluent schools have. This creates a problem because until there is some sort of equity in funding for all public schools, raising the standards of education will not be realistic. In a poor school, teachers are scarce and the teacher to student ratio is highly disproportionate. There are often an overwhelmingly larger amount of students than there are of teachers at main public schools. Without the money needed to hire more teachers, update textbooks, and renovate old and decrepit facilities, raising academic standards will not only be a futile venture, it may also put underprivileged students at more of a disadvantage than they already are. " If [students] are told that they must meet higher standards, or—worse—if they are chastised because they cannot do so, then they will have been punished for events beyond their control" (Biddle 1997: 6). One proposed solution is referred to as the " foundation program" (Kozol 1991: 207). According to the specifications of this program, there would be a few different steps in raising more money for public schools. First, there would be a " local tax upon the value of the homes and businesses in a given district" that would cover some of the funds (Kozol 1991: 208). This would

probably be enough for wealthy neighborhoods but in the other cases, " the state will then provide sufficient funds to lift the poorer districts to a level (...) roughly equal to that of the richest districts" (Kozol 1991: 208). Although this plan has merits and could perhaps work, it is unlikely that the state would be willing to budget that much money to help fund poor school districts. Until students are able to go to equally funded schools, they will not receive the same quality of education as those students in wealthier districts. The same sort of argument applies to the issue of child poverty. When children grow up in impoverished homes, they are often exposed to " chronic pain and disease" and " communities that are afflicted by physical decay, serious crime, gangs, and drugs" (Biddle 1997: 4). They are not able to attend schools that offer quality a education, and therefore will never be able to succeed academically. Even if poorer students are able to go to schools with higher funding, they are generally tracked into lower level courses and designated as " at risk" students. If this is in fact the case, those students will have to work extremely hard to move up to a different level because their homes " provide little access to the books, writing materials, computers, and other supports for education that are normally present in middle-class or affluent homes" (Biddle 1997: 3). Therefore, these students often become labeled early on in their lives and teachers tend to expect less of them than they would of those students labeled differently. Raising the standards for these children would be nearly impossible. However, there are some people who believe that the math and science tests which have so many officials worried are not necessarily that important. It is the opinion of some educators that, although education probably does need some

improvement, these tests may not need to be the focus. Fourth and eighth graders who took these tests scored significantly higher than the twelfth graders did which may show that " recent attention to standards and better schools had begun to pay off but had not reached the upper levels of schooling" (Bronner 1998: 2). Others argue that the colleges in America are widely known to be the best in the world; therefore, something had to have gone right in the earlier years to constitute such excellent universities. Other sources say that we should offer a wider variety of math and science courses and that in these courses, we should emphasize problem solving and the application of mathematical knowledge, rather than math that "[focuses] on one mode of computation and usually [requires] precise answers only" (Brodinsky 1985: 28). American schools seem to offer a more creative foundation of knowledge than other nations. Although the core subjects—math, science, reading, writing, etc. —are important, it is also essential to offer subject such as humanities, foreign languages, and fine arts, in order to produce a well-rounded education. There is no resolution in sight for the problem in American education and, therefore, the debate about what sort of action to take will continue. The opposing sides are equally matched and the students are now left to bear the consequences of any decisions made by politicians and policy-makers about the future of their education. But until we can work out the problems associated with the economic positions of public school students, nothing can be accomplished. We will not make progress through the rigorous testing of students in math and science. These tests are not as necessary as improving the quality of the overall education and learning experience of American students.