



New analysis makes case for higher ranking for U.S. schools

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By Greg Toppo, USA TODAY

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The idea that [U.S.](#) public schools are falling behind the rest of the world is widely accepted, but a new analysis of international data suggests that using rankings to sort global winners from losers is often misguided, exaggerating tiny differences between countries that may be producing nearly identical results.

In other words, maybe U.S. schools are not as bad as you might think.

"Sometimes rankings can make small gaps appear big and vice versa," says researcher Tom Loveless of the liberal-leaning [Brookings Institution](#) think tank.

Loveless, whose analysis is out Thursday, looked at statistics showing that the [United States](#) in 2007 ranked 11th among 36 countries in fourth-grade math.

Re-examining the data, he found that when nations with "statistically indistinguishable" scores were grouped, the U.S. group — which includes Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands — was essentially in fifth place worldwide.

"Nobody ever digs that deep," Loveless says. "They just want the scores and the rankings, and they don't ever really look at this part of it."

By Rich Pedroncelli, AP

U.S. public schools may not be as far behind their international counterparts as previously thought, according to a new study.

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The sagging performance in the United States, compared with the rest of the industrialized world, has become a key theme among education reformers.

It was front-and-center in the education documentaries *Waiting for Superman* and *Two Million Minutes*.

Rick Hess, an education researcher at the [American Enterprise Institute](#), a conservative think tank, says the data aren't always so conclusive.

For one thing, he says, it's not clear that all nations administer the tests uniformly.

Hess says international comparisons deserve "the good, hard-nosed kind of skepticism and shoe-leather reporting" that Loveless is doing.

"If this were part of a voucher debate, there'd be huge questions about whether the kids in the district schools and the private schools were being given the same assessment in the same way," he says. "But that has somehow just kind of been brushed aside when we're talking about the international context."

Loveless, a former educator who has taught in schools ranging from a Sacramento-area public school to Harvard, is a leading researcher on international education.

Loveless has served since 2004 on the general assembly of the [International Association](#) for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, which administers the top two global skills tests.

His findings, part of Loveless' annual [Brown Center Report on Education](#), also include the first major challenge to the [Common Core](#) standards, a proposed set of national academic benchmarks that [President Obama](#) and others say will improve schools nationwide.

Loveless says the standards are unlikely to produce improvements, because states have had their own "common" standards for decades, and variability among schools within each state remains wide.

He says the Common Core will likely have little effect on achievement.

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"The nation will have to look elsewhere for ways to improve its schools," Loveless says.

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20 comments

[Add a comment](#)**Kenneth Harris** · University of Phoenix

I've been a teacher and worked through all of this. No single answer works. Sorry, you can't fix what is a culturally inherent problem like the Greek Debt (they pay bribes to avoid paying taxes). The number one thing that seems to make a difference is....parenting. It isn't the school, standards, money, or the building you learn in. The second item is the individual.

[Reply](#) · [20](#) · [Like](#) · Thursday at 3:55am**Don Scotter** · Top Commenter

Thank you for putting it such honest straight forward terms. I agree 100%. As one who myself went 8 years to a one room country school house (all 8 grades together) with no plumbing I've always said it's not the facility or the money. It's whether you and your parents care.

[Reply](#) · [8](#) · [Like](#) · Thursday at 5:41am**Tom Kane** · Top Commenter · George Mason University

I agree, Kenneth, parents are the key to how a child views education-- and how much they value learning. Culturally, it has become commonplace to even attack educators as lacking common sense, as 'elitists,' 'brainwashers,' and even as 'thugs.' Hard to think about those who make these attacks as valuing education. I don't blame kids in our society for not wanting to excel in math, know more about history, and delve into the fascinating world of science. They are being taught that education is useful only if they can personally turn that education into \$\$\$. What a myopic and dishearting perspective that brings to our students.

[Reply](#) · [7](#) · [Like](#) · Thursday at 7:05am**Warren White** · Top Commenter

Tom Kane
parents are the key to how a child views education-- and how much they value learning. Culturally, it has become commonplace to even attack educators as lacking common sense, as 'elitists,' 'brainwashers,' and even as 'thugs.'

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Blaming parents?....

The parents who were educated/cultarized in Union/Fed Govt dominated public education system, since JFK unionized it and Carter created the Dept of Education?

The fact is that the parents educated in state/locality run schools were the 'greatest generation...'

while the current crop of parents educated in Union/Federal dominated public schools are failures?

Union/Fed public schools drill in liberal dogmas, political correctness, lib groupthink... we see the result of a generation of it on our culture/values.

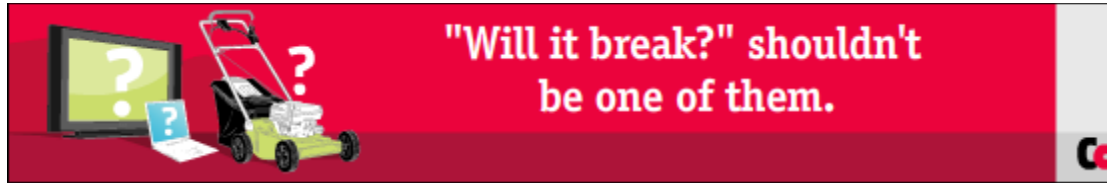
[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · Thursday at 8:17am[View 11 more](#)**James Wellington** · Senior Financial Analyst at CNN Money

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[Reply](#) · [4](#) · [Like](#) · Thursday at 12:41pm**Peter Tass**

What the rich know is to use other peoples' money, and if they do not succeed run to the government to bail them out.



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