

Education Matters

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Is She Your Competition?

Are India's Students Outpacing Yours?

By Liam Julian

Thomas Friedman decided in 2005 to overturn two millennia of astronomical wisdom by releasing a book called *The World Is Flat*, the crux of which is that the United States faces growing economic competition from countries such as China and India.

Three years after the book besieged bestseller lists, the nation has yet to get over it. When we read that Tata, the Indian conglomerate, has now bought Ford's Jaguar and Land Rover brands, and that it will soon start exporting electric cars to the U.S., we get a bit squirmy in our seats.

But most worrisome to Americans, it seems, is that our nation may be losing the human-capital battle, the struggle to produce, attract, and retain skilled and talented workers. A new documentary, *Two Million Minutes*, follows six high-

school students—two each from the United States, India, and China—and finds that the Asian-educated kids study (especially math and science) a lot more than their American peers.

The film's most fervent promoters call this a "crisis." The description oversimplifies, but it nonetheless illuminates a question that never quite abates, that always dwells just beneath the surface of other education conversations.

The Question

If the U.S. does face competition from Indian and Chinese students, are American interests better served by lavishing resources on our lowest academic achievers or our highest?

While Americans ask that question, one of our competitors, India, does not (or is only just beginning to). This difference between countries is a big deal, and yet it goes almost completely overlooked.

In January, the *New York Times* ran an article about India's public schools, which are fully lousy. Descriptions of absent teachers, masses of unidentified

pupils, and decrepit schoolhouses are no doubt startling to those who thought—who have been repeatedly told—that India is a model of educational excellence. Indeed, a *Times* reader who picked up the paper just two weeks earlier would have learned that Indian education is the envy of the world (a "craze"), and that East



Tata Motors recently acquired Jaguar and Land Rover from Ford for \$2.3 billion. Tata Motors is part of the Tata Group, one of India's biggest industrial conglomerates.



Asian parents simply cannot get enough of it.

The friction here is produced by the mounds of shoddy reporting and commenting that draw no distinction between

India's private schools, which, according to *Two Million Minutes*, enroll nearly a third of its student population, and its public schools, which, because of their generally dismal quality, might as well enroll nobody.

As James Tooley, professor of education policy at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, England, has shown, most of the country's private schools do not serve the rich—far from it. But a recent *Washington Post* article points out that in India “a dual education system has emerged. India's economic boom has fueled the rise of elite private schools...while the public school system has become a dismal refuge.” (Perhaps this is why the aforementioned documentary juxtaposed students in an American public school with students in an elite Indian private school.)

Stark Differences

India's educational divisions are stark. The World Bank finds that educational inequality there exceeds not just that of neighboring countries (Sri Lanka, for example) but also of most Latin American countries and several African nations (e.g., Kenya, Tanzania, and Ghana). Such gaps are exacerbated by India's caste dis-

“[In India], 70 percent of public school teachers simply don't show up for work.”

tinctions, which are officially outlawed but still prevalent, especially in rural areas. Educational divisions are also tied to wealth; on any given day in the poor state of

Bihar, home to some 83 million people, 70 percent of public school teachers simply don't show up for work. The national government has not developed a passable public school system and has left most educational authority in states' hands; some states do an okay job, others don't, and thus hundreds of millions of Indians are illiterate and uneducated.

Higher Education

Higher education in India is not for the masses, either. A mere 7 percent of Indians between 18 and 23 are enrolled in college, compared to 41 percent of U.S. 18- to 24-year-olds. (And while India has several top-notch institutions, according to NASSCOM President Kiran Karnik, three-fifths of the country's colleges offer lamentable instruction. McKinsey & Company estimates that only a quarter of the country's engineers meet the standards of Western employers.)

The United States, by contrast, has one of the world's most equally educated citizenries, hard as that may be to believe. For all its zealous capitalism, America nonetheless understands that its resources should not be proffered to privilege only. Thus, the U.S. strives for a balance be-

tween equity (No Child Left Behind) and competitiveness that other countries such as India have heretofore ignored. Democratic India cannot ignore it forever, though. As the nation grows wealthier, its poorer citizens will no longer countenance a system of elite private schools for the wealthy and dreadful government schools for the poor.

America's K-12 education undoubtedly can and should improve (and perhaps some stellar Indian private schools could serve as models). But their tune-up ought not be driven by maintaining international competitiveness, or keeping up with the number of Indian engineers—vague and ephemeral notions, both. It should be justified mostly by domestic and moral considerations because the connections between a nation's K-12 system and international economics are so many and varied. And no country can be internationally competitive if it is submerged in national strife.

Consider, for example, that India's vaunted information technology sector employs a mere one quarter of 1 percent of the nation's labor force. Who knew? The other 99.75 percent of India's workers most likely did; they are beginning to demand a piece of the economic action (better schools, better infrastructure, more job variety) that government will be unable to continue denying them. It's a good bet that even hyperglobalized India will soon need to turn its focus inward.

To compare the schools of the U.S. and India is folly—because both nations are so big and different, because their school systems are so diverse, it is akin to comparing, say, American and Indian trees. To base education policy (math and science, for example) on such coarse and anecdotal judgments seems even more foolish. When it comes to K-12 education, nations would do better to act locally before attempting to think globally. ■



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THE JOY OF ART

New Orleans Cultural Heritage Comes to Life through an Inspiring Mural Created in Four Schools

Louisiana art teachers Natalie Cooper, Haitham Eid, Kyle Bravo, Todd Schaffer and Chris DiOrio worked with students from four New Orleans public and charter schools to make artistic tiles using Crayola Model Magic that came together to create a mural.

The art project is aimed at revitalizing arts education programs in four New Orleans schools that were all damaged in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina nearly three years ago.

Through the partnership, students and teaching artists from these schools were given the opportunity to work together to craft Crayola Model Magic mural tiles, which are now assembled to create one, inspirational mural for the recovering community.

With Crayola's donation of art supplies, including paint, Model Magic, crayons, markers, and Slick Sticks, to each school, and the programs provided by Young Audiences Arts for Learning, teachers at these four schools have an opportunity for students to experience the benefits of arts education.

"At Crayola we believe that there's nothing more rewarding than seeing a child's creativity expressed through art," said Nancy DeBellis, Director of Education & Early Childhood at Crayola.

The mural, using the tiles from the four schools, was displayed at the Crayola opening night event at the National Art Education Association (NAEA) Conference in New Orleans on March 26, and was officially unveiled the following day at the New Orleans Convention Center.

The mural will go on tour to each of the four participating schools, allowing fellow students and faculty to appreciate the artistic creativity and hard work that went into this Young Audiences and Crayola project.

Young Audiences is the nation's leading source of arts-in-education programs and services. It has teamed up with Crayola to foster creativity and arts appreciation among the country's youth.

The joint project is also working in collaboration with the NAEA, the nation's largest organization for the visual arts.

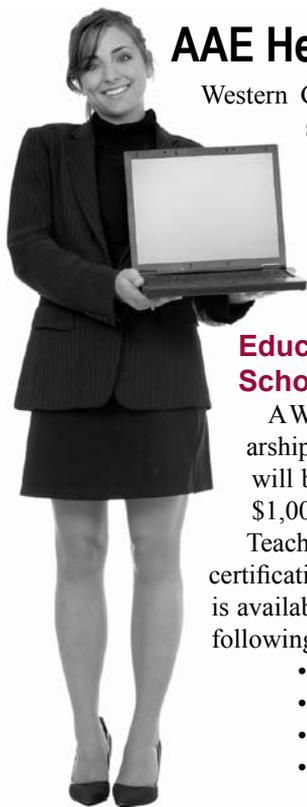
Through the partnership, students from Young Audiences' Louisiana chapter affiliate schools will demonstrate that New Orleans' rich culture with deep roots in the arts is still alive and thriving.

Young Audiences is a 56-year-old network of 31 local chapters and affiliated organizations across the United States dedicated to helping young people learn in and through the arts. A recipient of the National Medal of Arts, Young Audiences develops innovative methods of introducing music, dance, theater, and the visual arts to students from pre-school through grade 12. A leading source of arts-in-education services across

the country, Young Audiences is the largest sponsor of artists in American public schools, connecting over 5,000 artists with young people through a wide range of arts programs. Young Audiences' programs annually reach more than 7 million children in nearly 8,000 schools. ■

For more information, visit www.youngaudiences.org.





AAE Helps Teachers Win Scholarships

Western Governors University (WGU), with the support of the Association of American Educators (AAE), is pleased to announce that WGU will award two quarterly scholarships designed to help currently working K-12 teachers attend college—on their schedule.

Educational Leadership Scholarship

A WGU-AAE Educational Leadership Scholarship is valued up to \$5,000. The scholarship will be credited to your account at the rate of \$1,000 per six-month term.

Teachers with a bachelor's degree and valid certification are qualified to apply. The scholarship is available to individuals interested in one of the following master's degrees:

- M.Ed. in Instructional Design
- M.Ed. in Learning and Technology
- M.Ed. in Measurement and Evaluation
- M.S. in Educational Leadership

Classroom Excellence Scholarship

A WGU-AAE Classroom Excellence Scholarship is valued up to \$5,000. The scholarship will be credited to your account at the rate of \$1,000 per six-month term.

Teachers with a bachelor's degree and valid certification are qualified to apply. The scholarship is available to individuals interested in one of the following master's degrees:

- M.A. in Mathematics Education
- M.A. in Science Education
- M.A. in English Language Learning/English as a Second Language (K-12)
- M.S. in Special Education (PK-12)

Western Governors University is the only accredited university in the United States offering online competency-based degree programs. The private, nonprofit university was founded and is supported by nineteen governors, as well as more than twenty leading corporations and foundations.

The scholarship application deadline is July 15, 2008. For application details, visit www.wgu.edu/aaescholarships.

Quote of Note

"I cannot claim to be a good teacher simply because I have a master's in education, two licenses, and eight years of experience. I can claim to be a good teacher only if the data demonstrate that my students have learned."

—Jason Kamras, 2005 National Teacher of the Year

Teaching Defense

Public schools across the country are burdened by endless laws, rules, and regulations that make it exceedingly difficult for schools to effectively educate America's children.

- 82 percent of teachers and 77 percent of principals say schools practice "defensive teaching"—meaning decisions are motivated by a desire to avoid legal challenges.



• 85 percent of teachers and principals think that eliminating legal challenges from day-to-day decisions would help improve the quality of education in their schools.

- 78 percent of teachers say that students are quick to remind them that they have rights or that their parents can sue.

Source—www.commongood.org

ACLU Sues District for Low Graduation Rates



The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has filed another misguided lawsuit in suing the Palm Beach County, Florida, School District for having low graduation rates among minorities.

The school district with 170,000 students had a 71.4 percent graduation rate last year.

However, the graduation rates among Hispanics

and African-Americans were 20 and 29 points lower, respectively. The ACLU demands that the district "live up to its constitutional obligations [in Florida] to provide a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high-quality education."

"We all want to see graduation rates rise," remarked Palm Beach County School District Superintendent Arthur Johnson. "The suit is misguided and designed to get attention."

Superintendent Johnson argues that students who drop out of high school do not necessarily do so because they are failing courses but because school is not an important part of their lives. He believes that creating a school that allows students to take classes in fields they are interested in such as construction and biotechnology would help increase graduation rates.

School Choice a Key Issue for Latino Voters in '08

The war in Iraq, the economy, and health care are clearly key election issues for presidential candidates in 2008, but among Hispanic voters, school choice may very well prove to be a key priority.

Two recent public opinion surveys, one conducted by the Hispanic Council on Reform and Educational Options (Hispanic CREO); and another conducted by Harvard University, demonstrate that Hispanics strongly support school choice programs. One poll indicates that school choice is a top voting issue among Latinos.

The Harvard study, published by *Education Next* magazine, indicated that 61 percent of Hispanics support vouchers for low-income families. Similarly, 54 percent of Hispanics support initiatives to provide school vouchers to all children in failing public schools. In the Hispanic CREO/Alliance poll, a bipartisan survey conducted by the polling company, inc. (no, it is not capitalized) and The Amerpsand Agency, 65 percent of Hispanic voters said they are more likely to vote for

candidates who support school choice than candidates who do not. Only 19 percent stated that they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supported school choice.

The poll also showed that education is among the top three voting issues for 82 percent of Latino voters, with the highest percentage (43 percent) of poll respondents rating school choice as their top educational priority.

A full 75 percent of the Hispanic parents polled said they would be interested in using their own tax dollars to send their children to a private school—or to a public school in a higher-performing district.

Source—School Choice Activist, a publication of Alliance for School Choice.



Teacher Union Doesn't Like the Idea of Higher Pay for Teachers



A controversial new charter school set to open in New York City in 2009 is already drawing criticism from the local teacher union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), for offering something that most teachers have been hoping and praying for—a decent salary.

Zeke M. Vanderhoek, the school's founder, is promising to pay his teachers \$125,000 in annual salary, plus bonuses

based on schoolwide performance. That's right, \$125,000!

According to an article in the *New York Times*, Randi Weingarten, UFT president, called the generous salary base “a good experiment,” but practically promised that the experiment would fail because the schools teachers are not union members. She says the school's performance would suffer because teachers would be hampered by a lack of power (read “Collective Bargaining in Dealing with the Principal”).

The principal, by the way, is Zeke Vanderhoek himself. Vanderhoek, a Yale graduate and former middle school teacher, will serve as the school's first principal, earning \$90,000 per year and plans to replace himself within four years. Not surprisingly, his plan does not sit well with the president of the city principals' union either. Earnest A. Logan, speaking on behalf of the union, says that paying the principal less than the teachers is “the craziest thing I've ever heard.” Not so crazy to teachers, we bet.

However, Mr. Vanderhoek is not just going to hand out those kinds of salaries without expecting some real accountability and results in return. In exchange, his teachers will work longer days and cover some of the duties support staff would handle in traditional public schools, and teach more students per class—30 student per teacher.

Vanderhoek expects most of his school's students will come from low-income Hispanic families. All students will take Latin and music courses.

The school's teachers will be selected through a very demanding selection process (which can be previewed on its website, www.tepcharter.org). Many of the city's best and brightest are already applying, according to Vanderhoek. The school has received city and state approval of its charter.

Keep your eye on the Equity Project Charter School. We're sure many education policymakers will be as well.

Teacher Absences

How much of a problem is it?



A new study examining teacher absentee rates in North Carolina has turned up some surprising results. Yes, teachers take off significantly more days than people do in other professions—but not all that much, considering the performance demands of teaching and the predominance of young women in the profession. Yes, teachers working in schools serving poor children are more likely to be absent—but the variance is not shocking, with an average of one more missed day in a school year (nine versus eight). However, if a child is poor, the odds are much greater that s/he will be assigned to a school with a history of high absenteeism among teachers. In other words, there are many more schools serving poor children with above-average absentee rates than there are schools serving children who are not poor.

Duke researchers Charles Clotfelter, Helen Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor continue their lucrative mining of North Carolina school data, giving us a more accurate picture of not only absenteeism but also its impact on student learning in classrooms. They calculate that a substitute in the classroom for ten days has about 20 percent of the deleterious impact on student learning that first-year teachers generally have. Given that just about the worst thing you can do to students (educationally speaking) is assigning them a first-year teacher, missed days quickly add up to having serious consequences, especially when the effects accumulate year after year.

How to Address It

One of the most interesting discussions in the paper is that the state and district rules that govern how absences should be handled have an observable impact on absentee rates. When teachers in North Carolina finish taking the ten “penalty-free” days that they are permitted, they must then pay \$50 towards a

substitute for each additional day that they miss. Not coincidentally, most teachers miss no more than ten days.

Given the high cost (financial and social) of missed days, Clotfelter and his colleagues suggest that states and districts consider a much earlier penalty for missed days, which could be compensated by a higher salary. It’s clearly an economist’s solution, failing to factor in the psychological impact of having to pay for being sick, no matter what your salary is. A more workable policy solution might be to give principals direct control over a distinct pot of money—out of which they would pay their substitute teachers and also award teachers with high attendance at the end of the school year. Such a fund would serve the useful purpose of alerting districts to principals who tolerate frequent and excessive absenteeism among their staffs. ■

Source—National Council on Teacher Quality’s TQBulletin.

Teachers Talk Back

When *Education Week* ran an article on this research teachers fired back in the online comments section. Here are three samples.

“As a teacher who taught in a rather rough, low-income school, those discretionary days that the article implies are inappropriate days off are very, very important mental health days!” —*IMarco*

“I teach 151 Senior English students. I have taken eight ‘sick days’ this year to simply do work. To grade one set of research papers takes me 75 hours—and they wonder why we miss work without being sick. Who has time to be sick!!” —*WRyan*

“I believe that quality subs mitigate the negative impact of the teachers’ absences. If there are NOT excessive absences, then it’s all about the subs and how well they are trained to take over a classroom and follow lesson plans.” —*Marcy*



Hearing on Afterschool Programs



Recently, the House Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee held a hearing to discuss funding for afterschool programs in the 2009 budget. President Bush's 2009 budget calls for cutting funds for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program by 26 percent (\$280 million). It is one of the main programs supported by federal funds for afterschool programs. "As a former teacher, I know firsthand the difference that good afterschool programs can make in the lives of children and their communities," stated the chairman of the subcommittee, Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI).

In President Bush's proposed budget, this program would be changed to an afterschool and summer school scholarship program, giving parents more options for afterschool programs. Competitive grants would be awarded to public or private nonprofit organizations to be given to low-income families who have students enrolled in schools identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under Title I, or have a graduation rate less than 60 percent. The U.S. Department of Education would require states to ensure that the programs for which students would use the scholarships have high quality academic components.

Different Accountability under NCLB



An issue of concern for many states and school districts with NCLB has been the fact that schools face the same sanctions from the federal government if they are underperforming regardless if the school needs minor or wholesale changes. On March 18, Education Secretary Margaret Spell-

ings announced that this practice will be changed with the implementation of a "differentiated accountability" program.

Under the new pilot program, ten states will be given the opportunity from the U.S. Department of Education to put into practice a system that makes distinctions between schools that have barely missed their goals and schools that need greater interventions. Schools that participate in the pilot program will still need to meet the goal of having all students reading and doing math on grade level by 2014, but they will be given greater flexibility in meeting the goal. States that have made strides in accountability, such as Maryland, North Dakota, Louisiana, and South Dakota, will be given first priority in applying for the pilot program. Massachusetts will also be given priority due to their work on standards.

Math Panel Issues Findings



U.S. Department of Education recently released the final report of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel. The panel worked for more than two years reviewing the best available scientific evidence to advance the teaching and learning of mathematics. The experts on the National Mathematics Advisory Panel represent vast experience in their respective fields. They have received testimony from more than 200 individuals and nearly 150 organizations, and reviewed more than 16,000 research studies.

The report respects the role of teachers as those in the best position to determine how to teach a given concept or skill. Instead of defining methods for teaching, the report offers a timeline of when students must master critical topics. The panel determined that students need to develop rapid recall of arithmetic facts in the early grades, going on to master fractions in middle school. Having built this strong foundation, students would then

be ready for rigorous algebra courses in high school or earlier. Noting changing demographics and rising economic demands, Secretary Spellings stressed the significance of the panel's findings on algebra.

"The panel's research showed that if students do well in algebra, then they are more likely to succeed in college and be ready for better career opportunities in the global economy of the 21st century," she said.

For more information on the National Mathematics Advisory Panel and its findings, please visit www.ed.gov/MathPanel.

New Study Lauds Physical Education



A new study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that physical education can help raise academic achievement in girls. The reading and math skills of over 5,000 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade were tracked, and it was found that girls who received 70-300 minutes a week of physical education scored higher on reading and math tests than girls who received 35 minutes or less a week of physical education. According to Susan Carlson, a CDC epidemiologist, increased exercise may foster positive classroom behaviors that could result in better classroom participation and concentration skills. Source—*USA Today*



Read AAE press releases at www.aateachers.org. Click on "press room."

Charter Schools Are Here to Stay

A Brief Look at Growth

By David W. Kirkpatrick

Until 1992, there were no charter schools in the United States. Then, the first one opened in St. Paul, Minnesota, and continues to this day. The difference is that it is now joined by about 4,200 others, with a total enrollment of some 1.2 million, and eight major areas have 20 percent or more of their students in public charter schools. A bit more than 2,000 schools opened from 1992-2001, and about 2,000 more did so in the past seven years. There could be more since there are 365,000 prospective students on waiting lists.

These numbers give the charter schools the critical mass necessary to organize in their own defense at the local, state, and national levels. One such group, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, issues a weekly report on the Internet, "Charter Schools News Connection." Its news in the past few months has included the following:

- **IN ST. LOUIS**, Mayor Francis Slay says he can wait no longer for that city's schools to improve. As a result he has written letters to educators, nonprofit education groups, and charter school companies nationwide in an attempt to create more charter schools in the city, which he believes will, in turn, attract more families to the city. More important than mere letters, however, the mayor's office has indicated that it will provide support for charter applicants



and operators, including helping them secure school buildings, find loans, and gain approval for their proposals.

- **IN CALIFORNIA** alone a record was set in 2007 for opening new charter schools, with 103 doing so, breaking the earlier high of 84 in 2005. These brought the total number of charter schools in California to 686. In Los Angeles, the year saw 23 new charter schools created, bringing the total to 125, the most for any city in the nation.
- **IN NEW ORLEANS**, where the havoc wreaked by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 damaged the city's schools as well as the community in general, more than half the city's students now attend 40 charter schools. These represent half of the public schools in the city, and another nine charter schools may open by this fall. The latest good news for them is that three philanthropies—the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Doris and Donald Fisher Fund, and the Broad Foundation—are going to give \$17.5 million to help New Orleans' schools. These dollars will go to create and support charter schools, train and support 40 principals, and attract teachers to the city.
- **IN RHODE ISLAND**, one city shows an example of some of the creative ap-

proaches made possible by effective charter school laws. Mayor Daniel McKee of Cumberland, Rhode Island, is proposing a public elementary school that will serve five separate communities in that state. Enrolling 200 students, the school will have no admission criteria and will be the first of several schools to be developed over the next five to six years in the area. Oversight for the first school will be provided by the mayor or a board of mayors from the five communities, while day-to-day operations will be run by a nonprofit organization. However, to do this, it will be first necessary to have the state legislature lift a charter moratorium or pass new legislation that will specifically create a regional school system in the area, Rhode Island's Blackstone Valley.

- **IN NEW YORK**, 79 percent of the state's charter schools received As and Bs compared to 62 percent of regular public schools.

Not all is rosy, as some charter schools never got off the ground, others began but didn't last, a few states have not adopted charter school laws, and diehard opponents are still trying to block any progress or even roll the movement back if they can. So, skirmishes exist, but going from 0 to 4200 schools and from 0 to 1.2 million students in a bit more than 15 years clearly indicates this is a school reform movement that will not be stopped. ■



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