



Written by [Beverly K. Eakman](#) on June 27, 2011

U.S. Leaders Seek Immigrant “Savants” to Jumpstart American Economy

Michigan’s Republican Gov. Rick Snyder (left), a former computer executive/entrepreneur, now in his first elective office, has seized upon an idea he believes will dig the state out of its unemployment quagmire — one that’s among the highest in the country. He announced June 21 that he will be looking to “foreign-born engineers, scientists, and cutting-edge tech savants” to jumpstart Michigan’s business and commerce. All kinds of data, he says, support his concept, Global Michigan Initiative. He points to Silicon Valley in particular as having launched some one-half of its computer and silicon chip businesses with immigrant technical wizards.



New York Mayor [Michael Bloomberg](#) gave the notion a plug on *Meet the Press* when he said, “[I]f I were the federal government, assuming you could wave a magic wand and pull everybody together, you pass a law letting immigrants come in as long as they agreed to go to Detroit and live there for five or 10 years.”

Journalist Steve Tobocman, a Democrat and former member of the Michigan House of Representatives, provides the background for this proposal in an [article](#) for *The Detroit News*, explaining how he came to the conclusion that “Metro Detroit’s immigrant population is among the most talented in the nation”:

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Two years ago, I was commissioned by the New Economy Initiative (a coalition of 10 of the region’s largest foundations), the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce, and the Skillman Foundation to study the impacts that immigrants have on our regional economy and job prospects for Detroiters and working families across the region. The Global Detroit study (available at www.globaldetroit.com) provided some dramatic results and confirmed that immigrants actually create significant economic growth and job opportunities for all of us.

Turns out that Tobocman’s grandfather emigrated from eastern Poland to Southwest Detroit in the early 20th century to find a better life. In a [February 8, 2011, article](#) his grandson-journalist notes that today,

[H]alf of all new doctorates in engineering; 45 percent of all new doctorates in life sciences, physical sciences, and computer sciences; and 40 percent of all new masters’ degrees in computer sciences, physical sciences, and engineering are awarded nationally to foreign-born students. These results matriculate into the American workplace where 47 percent of all scientists and engineers with Ph.D.s and 24 percent of all scientists and engineers with bachelor degrees are



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foreign born. Immigrants make up 25 percent of all practicing physicians in the U.S.

Little wonder, then, that Tobocman, Bloomberg, Gov. Snyder, and others believe that looking overseas for immigrant talent is a “job generator” for the USA. They think creative, innovative immigrants will start businesses which, in turn, will hire American workers, many of whom are currently unemployed, and thereby “incubate a stronger economic culture....” (One might wonder how these immigrant entrepreneurs will navigate the regulations, rules, and administrative paperwork starting a business will entail, but leaders such as Mayor Bloomberg and Gov. Snyder aren’t addressing the issue.)

The real question, though, is what this says about the American-born population’s level of knowledge, creativity, innovative determination, and work ethic. More specifically, what does it say about American schools?

In examining the results of the so-called Nation’s Report Card (a publication of the U.S. Dept. of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences, based in the National Assessment of Educational Progress), one reads dithering results such as these, year after year (the [one below is for measuring pupil progress in reading](#), 2009):

The overall average score for fourth-graders in 2009 was unchanged from the score in 2007 but was higher than the scores in other earlier assessment years from 1992 to 2005. The average score for eighth-graders in 2009 was 1 point higher than in 2007 and 4 points higher than 1992 but was not consistently higher than in all the assessment years in between. There were no significant changes from 2007 to 2009 in the score gaps between White and Black students or between White and Hispanic students....

The Nation’s Report Card has been around since 1969, and was the first publication to sound the alarm on American students’ poor showing compared with other foreign pupils. Since that time, it has conducted national samples in schools covering basic subject areas using the National Assessment (or NAEP), coupled to state assessments that are similar to the national test. Note that all of them are dubbed “assessments” — and for good reason: because they are not “tests.” They measure hard knowledge to some extent, but they also assess opinions, personal feelings, and worldviews (many touching on hot-button political issues), as well as collect parental data and school-specific information — e.g., number of hours spent on homework or watching TV, and number of absentee days. All these data points eventually are merged with other information covering everything from religious affiliation to the how long Mom was in labor! (For a detailed look at the data collected, including visual evidence, see [here](#) and [here](#).)

So, when one logs onto the National Report Card website and clicks on the most recent year’s statistics for, say, mathematics or science, the reader will scroll through pages of extraneous information before getting to the point: namely, how the kids scored in basic subjects relative to previous years. Once there, one finds a continuing story of near-stagnation, despite all the money taxpayers have funneled into education since 1969. Take this year’s Report measuring progress in history, for example: Only “12 percent of high-school seniors, who are getting ready to vote for the first time, have a proficient knowledge of history,” according to syndicated columnist [Suzanne Fields](#). “We’re raising young people who are, by and large, historically illiterate. ... It’s shocking,” says historian David McCullough in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Every time around, it’s the same: One year two points or so up, the next time a point or so down, with the level of common knowledge either worse or unchanged overall. Consider, too, that even “real” tests,



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such as they are, have been dumbed-down out of concerns for fairness in race, gender, or ethnicity. They also are increasingly influenced by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), which means politicized. So any actual “testing” bears little resemblance to 1969.

As for job/career readiness, to which some might include “work ethic,” youngsters today are urged to become “team players” — reminiscent of the old Soviet Comintern’s “collective spirit” — not individual achievers. This has far-reaching implications for innovation and creativity. The child learns primarily to be well-liked and not to “make waves” as opposed to being accomplished, well-rounded, and having a grasp of basic disciplines that will catapult the pupil to professionalism in a field later on.

A few outspoken leaders within the U.S. Department of Education admit that American schoolchildren are not held to the standards that many foreign countries demand of their pupils. Pascal D. Forgione, Jr., Ph.D., U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics, declared in a speech that even if a school is said to compare well on SAT scores, it probably is “lightweight on the international scale.” (That speech has now been removed from the Internet: For proof that it existed see [here](#).) In referring to [ongoing educational decline](#), Dr. Forgione says: “By the time our students are ready to leave high school — ready to enter higher education and the labor force — they are doing so badly with science [that] they are significantly weaker than their peers in other countries.... Our idea of “advanced” is clearly below international standards.”

Juxtaposing comments such as this with the recent statements by Gov. Snyder, Mayor Bloomberg and Mr. Tobocman, it appears that foreign nationals may soon be eating America’s lunch. Somehow, in spite of UNESCO or concerns over political correctness, European, Indian, and other nations’ K-12 schools are doing the job America’s won’t do.

Beverly K. Eakman began her career as a teacher in 1968. She left to become a science writer for a NASA contractor, then editor-in-chief of NASA’s newspaper in Houston. She later served as a speechwriter and research-writer for the director of Voice of America and two other federal agencies, including the U.S. Dept. of Justice. She has since penned six books, scores of feature articles and op-eds covering education policy, mental-health, data-trafficking, science, privacy and political strategy. Her e-mail, a detailed bio, speaking appearances and links to her books all can be found on her website: www.BeverlyEakman.com.



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