



Written by [Ralph R. Reiland](#) on December 10, 2013

Education's Ongoing Crackup

Globally, the bad news regarding America's ability to successfully operate in an increasingly competitive and interconnected world economy is that 15-year-olds in the U.S. slipped further down in their rankings on international achievement tests recently administered by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Every three years, the Program for International Student Assessment, commonly known as PISA, tests students from 65 countries and several locales that produce 80 percent of the world's economic output.



In math performance, American students in the latest testing slipped six places in the international ranking, from 25th place to 31st place since 2009. In science and reading performance since 2009, American students dropped four and ten places, respectively, from 20th to 24th in science and from 11th place to 21st place in reading.

Only 9 percent of 15-year-olds in the U.S. scored in the top two levels of proficiency in math, compared with 40 percent in Singapore and 17 percent in Poland and Germany.

The good news for American taxpayers is that an analysis of the test results shows a strong correlation between test scores and student punctuality and attendance and a weak correlation between class size and test scores.

So rather than hiking property taxes in order to hire more teachers and cut class sizes, what we need to do first to beat Russia (they scored slightly above us) and Poland (they just pulled ahead of us) is bounce our drowsy buggers out of bed on time and get them on the road with an industrious and agreeable mindset, like the kids in Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan (they're at the top of the list in the achievement rankings).

We should also stop the "everyone gets a trophy" idea which basically and illogically says that no one wins but everyone is a winner just for showing up.

What that egalitarian pipe dream and flawed logic has produced is an oversupply of cocky non-performers who don't even bother to show up. Or if they're a cut above the no-shows, they think it's totally okay to show up late to pick up their punctuality awards.

"For decades, the prevailing wisdom in education was that high self-esteem would lead to high achievement," reports Michael Chandler, education columnist at the *Washington Post*. "The theory led to an avalanche of daily affirmations and award ceremonies — but few, if any, academic gains."

Getting causation backwards, the common sense idea that high performance would produce high self-esteem was replaced by the notion that high levels of self-esteem would produce high achievement. The result is that "American students' self-esteem outstripped their achievement, which fell compared



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to their international peers,” reports Chandler. “U.S. eighth-graders did worse in math than their peers in countries like Singapore and South Korea, but felt better about themselves and their ability in math.”

Similarly, American students took first place in self-judged mathematical ability in a comparative study of eight countries, but took last place in actual math competency. Korean students, in contrast, ranked themselves last in self-judged mathematical skills and took first place in actual math performance.

It is, obviously and unfortunately, not hard to find that same disastrous combination of self-judged high ability and sheer incompetency at the highest levels of the federal government, both at home and abroad, whether it’s with the planning and operation of the war in Iraq or with the development, mislabeling and roll out of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

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