



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on May 12, 2015

Int'l Tests Show U.S. Students Poor in Math, Civics, Literacy

The recent flurry of test results on how American students are faring in school has resulted in much commentary decrying their dismal performance compared to their international peers.

The PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) [study recently released](#) by the National Center for Education Statistics compared the performance of 15-year-old students among 65 countries, including all 34 member countries of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and confirmed what was already widely known: U.S. students are nowhere near the top in math, science, or literacy. Twenty-nine educational systems turn out better students than does the United States in mathematics, while students in 22 systems were more capable in science than were U.S. students. In reading literacy 19 educational systems turned out more skilled students than the U.S. public school system.



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Eighth-graders participating in the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) [test](#) given under the auspices of the Department of Education showed no significant improvement over their dismal performance recorded four years ago. Just 18 percent of them scored at or above the Proficient level in U.S. history, while 27 percent scored Proficient in geography, and 23 percent reached or exceeded that level in civics.

The latest from Pew Research — “What the Public Knows” — showed that 91 percent of Americans recognized Martin Luther King from his photograph taken nearly 50 years ago, but fewer than a third of them knew the current makeup of the U.S. Senate (54 Republicans, 44 Democrats, and two Independents) nor did they know how many women were on the Supreme Court (three). In fact, close scrutiny of the results from Pew indicated that the Millennials (age 18-34) knew even less than the average American.

This prompted George Nethercutt, a former member of the House of Representatives, to declare that “Americans get an F in civics” in his article in *The Hill* last week. He asserted, “The findings showed broad failures. If policymakers don’t soon pay attention to such failures, the perpetuation of citizen understanding of the basic concepts of the American system will continue to be at risk.”

Nethercutt spoke of the lack of understanding about the guarantees provided by the Founders, such as



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that a person charged in a crime is innocent until proven guilty under Amendments Five and Six to the Constitution. He further pointed out the rights to free speech guaranteed under the First Amendment, and declared:

When Americans are oblivious of basic constitutional principles, American society suffers. Such omissions are akin to a vehicle driver being unaware of the rules of the road, not understanding the importance of traffic lights, stop signs or rights-of-way at intersections. Such ignorance is bound to result in a crash and injury.

He then noted that without sufficient understanding of these basic principles, people will move on to more responsible positions in life, perhaps even in representative government, and will continue to promote policies that threaten that system: "Without change, leaders of tomorrow — today's students — will undertake leadership obligations in Congress, state legislatures, city councils, school boards and other important venues without the knowledge necessary to perpetuate the constitutional freedoms that have developed over two centuries."

Nethercutt needs to look a little closer to home. His record as a member of the House from the state of Washington from 1995 (during the Republican landslide of 1994) through 2004 belies his understanding of exactly what the Constitution he is touting is supposed to do. In his last three terms, his Freedom Index rating, issued by The John Birch Society as a measure of just how closely the votes of members of Congress hewed to the Constitution he so venerates, showed that he declined from 60 percent in the 106th Congress (1999-2000) to 43 percent in the 107th Congress (2001-2002) to 33 percent in the 108th Congress (2003-2004), for a miserable overall rating of just 47 percent. In simple terms, Nethercutt violated his oath of office to support and defend the Constitution half the time! For example, on July 13, 2004, he voted to give federal aid to farmers and federal food to individuals in violation of the Constitution. Two days later, on July 15, 2004, he voted twice for bills that violated the Constitution by agreeing to expend funds for foreign aid, also nowhere mentioned among the "enumerated powers" granted the federal government by the Constitution.

Nethercutt's conclusion, with himself and his performance in the House as a prime example, is correct: Students with little or no understanding of their history will have little ability to steer the ship of state in a constitutional direction in the future.

That's why the home-schooling movement is so vital to keeping that ship afloat and away from the shoals of authoritarianism. In another study (that Nethercutt failed to mention) from the DOE's Educational Resources Information Center, homeschoolers are learning precisely the skills needed:

Homeschool student achievement test scores were exceptionally high. The median scores for every subtest at every grade were well above those of public ... school students.

On average, homeschool students in grades one to four performed one grade level above their age-level peers on achievement tests....

Even with a conservative analysis of the data, the achievement levels of the homeschool students in the study were exceptional. Within each grade level and each skill area, the median scores for homeschool students fell between the 70th and 80th percentile of students nationwide....

For younger students, this is a one year lead. By the time homeschool students are in 8th grade, they are *four years ahead* of their public/private school counterparts. [Emphasis added.]

Nethercutt is a product of the public schools and traditional universities, and so is severely limited in



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his ability to see what's really needed in education in America. That's why his solution misses the mark when he suggests that "all states should adopt basic requirements for graduation." No, George. States and the federal government should remove themselves from the educational process altogether and allow the home schooling movement to flourish and grow even more rapidly.

A graduate of an Ivy League school and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at www.LightFromTheRight.com, primarily on economics and politics.



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