



## May 2012: Springtime Celebrations and Reflections

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### Educational Harvest

Spring is our favorite time of year. Just as harvest for the farmer happens in October, our educational harvest is just around the corner. We have all worked hard tending to our seedlings, pulling the weeds and ensuring the right amounts of sunshine and rain. We push through to the end, making every last lesson and last minute count. At graduation we celebrate every student that made it through, knowing that some of them required our constant support and attention. We have more AP scholars, more students mastering physics and chemistry, accomplished violinists, writers, artists, hurdlers, technology wizards, and future nurses, engineers, doctors, lawyers, welders, clothing designers ... you name it. They face the future - hopeful, accomplished and prepared. It is time for us to celebrate. It is also time to reflect on our investment in their success. What did we do right and what can we do better? Who isn't crossing the stage and why? The new seedlings are arriving in just a few short months, so now is our time to learn.

State level leaders in Iowa have spent the last year debating school reform. While there is disagreement about what approach we should take in Iowa to improve education, there is universal agreement that effective education changes lives and changes them for the better. Education leads to a robust economy with higher paying jobs, lower health care costs, fewer incarcerations, higher civic engagement and other factors one considers when describing the good life. At ISFIS we know you are working hard for the future of your students. We thought, however, it might be helpful to have information about what is happening in the world - how the economy is changing, what other countries are doing, and what that means for our Iowa schools. This particular *School Improvement Booster* focuses not on how educational systems improve but rather makes the case for why Iowa and American schools must improve. Later issues will be devoted to what the research says on how that might happen.

Caralee Adams notes in *Education Week* that the US ranks among the top five educated countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a global network of 34 developed countries that identifies and analyzes issues including education. However, that picture is changing. Americans between ages 25 and 34 rank 15<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of higher education degrees compared to other OECD countries. The United States is the only OECD country where attainment levels for those just entering the labor market are lower than those about to leave the labor market (Adams, Caralee, *Education Week*, 2012).

The expectation that all students must be ready for post-secondary education is a minimal expectation.

### Supporting Information

**The Undereducated American:** *Stephen Rose and Anthony Carnevale, 2011. Georgetown University, Center for Education and the Workforce.* [Click here](#) to read the whole article.

Rose and Carnavale have been studying education and workforce trends for several decades. This recent report extends their previous work. “The United States has been under-producing college-going workers since 1980. Supply has failed to keep pace with growing demand, and as a result, income inequality has risen precipitously. From 1915 to 1980, supply grew in tandem with demand. But, starting in 1990, the share of college-educated young people in the workforce rose very slowly. If we continue to under-produce college- educated workers, the large and growing gap between the earnings of Americans of different educational attainment will grow even wider. . . Americans are undereducated.”

### **US Education Pressured by International Comparisons**

Sean Cavanaugh writes in *Education Week*, “Many U.S. leaders say that the performance of American students on a handful of high-profile international tests and measurements—while mixed—underscores the weaknesses of the American education system, and foreshadows the serious economic challenges the country will face if it does not improve the skills of its future workforce. Those results show the following, among others:

- “American 15-year-olds scored at the international average of industrialized nations in science and reading and below the international average in math on the most recent [Program for International Student Assessment](#), or PISA, released last year.
- “Although students in the United States scored above the international averages in both 4th and 8th grade math and science, they performed well below high fliers such as Japan and Singapore on the 2007 [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study](#), or TIMSS, which compares developed and non-industrialized nations
- “ U.S. 4th graders topped 22 participating jurisdictions, and were outscored by just 10 of them, on the most recent [Progress in International Reading Literacy Study](#), or PIRLS, though American students' literacy marks stagnated from the previous exam.”

The United States' position in these assessments is much like Iowa's in the country. While American scores have not declined and in most cases have improved, several other nations have improved dramatically and surpassed the performance of American students. Some researchers assert that the United States has always scored poorly on tests of international comparison. The issue remains, however, that if our students are to have successful lives and our country is to remain an economic power, our future workforce must have the academic skills necessary to do so.

## The Polarization of Job Opportunities in the U.S. Labor Market: Implications for Employment and Earnings

David Autor, an economist from MIT, [wrote about job opportunities](#) for the Center for American Progress. His warning of polarization of income and opportunity creates urgency for preparing low students for those high skill/high wage jobs

### What does employment growth in the US and across the world look like?

- “Employment growth is polarizing, with job opportunities concentrated in relatively high-skill, high-wage jobs and low-skill, low-wage jobs...This employment polarization is widespread across industrialized economies; it is not a uniquely American phenomenon.”

### What contributes to this job picture?

- “The key contributors to job polarization are the automation of routine work by machines and, to a smaller extent, the international integration of labor markets through trade and, more recently, offshoring. The Great Recession has quantitatively but not qualitatively changed the trend toward employment polarization in the U.S. labor market. Employment losses during the recession have been far more severe in middle-skilled white-collar and blue-collar jobs than in either high-skill, white-collar jobs or in low-skill service occupations.”

### What impacts the rising disparity in earnings between college goers and non-college goers?

- “As is well known, the earnings of college-educated workers relative to high school-educated workers have risen steadily for almost three decades. Less widely discussed is that the rise in the *relative* earnings of college graduates are due both to rising *real* earnings for college workers and falling *real* earnings for non-college workers—particularly non-college males.”

### Since it is obvious that college-educated workers earn more, are more workers going to college?

- “Gains in educational attainment have not generally kept pace with rising educational returns, particularly for males. And the slowing pace of educational attainment has contributed to the rising college versus high school earnings gap.”

## One Degree of Separation: How Young Americans Who Don't Finish College See Their Chances for Success

Public Agenda surveyed high school students who didn't finish college. It appears these young people do not fully realize the impact of not attending post-secondary education. Schools can help these young students understand what college attendance means for their futures.

- **Finding One:** Compared to young people with degrees, high school graduates are less confident about their financial prospects and much less likely to be on a solid career path.
- **Finding Two:** Despite their worries about the future and mixed experiences with jobs, most high school graduates believe there are still ways to succeed at work without additional education.
- **Finding Three:** High school graduates are less likely to say it's a good idea to borrow money to go to college.

- **Finding Four:** High school graduates are more skeptical about the motives of higher education institutions than college graduates.
- **Finding Five:** High school graduates have gaps in knowledge that could undercut their own ability to get a college degree in the future.

Read the entire [Public Agenda study](#) to learn about ways your school can help change students' understanding of their college-going choice.

### Why must schools improve and how do we do it?

[In this webinar](#) for NWEA, Dylan Wiliam makes the case for why schools must change. He raises many interesting points, but it is all summed up in this statement, **“The world of work is changing faster than schools have improved.”**

Wiliam also describes the school models listed below and notes he has seen all three in the United States.

School Model	Culture within the School	Key Process
Talent Refineries	Schools must provide opportunities for students to show what they can do.	Ensuring good teaching and syllabus coverage.
Talent Incubators	All students can learn, but not all students can achieve at high levels.	Drawing out what is within the student.
Talent Factories	All students can achieve at high levels.	Whatever it takes.

Wiliam’s premise is intriguing. The school where things just move along as they always have isn’t even delineated in his chart. He presumes we are all focused on ensuring good teaching and covering the curriculum. Even that, in his view, isn’t enough. Learn more about this model so you can think about where your school is on the continuum of becoming a talent factory.

### Why Are Finland’s Schools Successful?

Some of you have what might be called “Finland Fatigue.” But we find their story compelling. **“In 1963, the Finnish Parliament made the bold decision to choose public education as its best shot at economic recovery.** ‘I call this the Big Dream of Finnish education,’ said (Pasi) Sahlberg (a director general in the Ministry of Education and Culture)... ‘It was simply the idea that every child would have a very good public school. If we want to be competitive, we need to educate everybody. It all came out of a need to survive.’” Read more about Finland’s success in [this article](#) written by LynNell Hancock for *The Smithsonian* in 2011.

### Good Websites

#### 10 of the best Apps for education

Jenna Zwang from eSchool News describes [10 of the best education apps](#). “As iPhones, iPads, and iPods become more integrated in classrooms, educators and students are looking for new ways to apply them to the learning process. Applications on all of these devices can help automate current classroom processes or present new ways to learn that previously had been unexplored.” These apps range in price

from free to \$9.99. Included in those listed is a history app entitled, "Today in History." This app provides a list of historical events occurring on each day and is free! On the day this newsletter is being finalized, May 2, we note that in the year 2000 President Bill Clinton announced that accurate GPS access would no longer be restricted to the United States military and that in 1918 General Motors acquired Chevrolet Motor Company of Delaware. Another app, PI83 Graphing Calculator, costs \$0.99 and replaces a TI-83 graphing calculator with a \$70 price tag. Star Walk is an astral telescope app, which adapts its view to wherever the user holds it up highlighting planets and constellations.

## Reading Corner

As promised, ISFIS staff reading habits will be featured for several months. Margaret Buckton, ISFIS partner, devours newspapers, political and educational information, but rarely finds time to read books for leisure (and if she does, it's usually some international crime espionage adventure love story or a cookbook). Besides being a partner in ISFIS and working way more than a 40 hour week, Margaret is a busy mom, participates fully in the life of her community, exercises regularly, and, as you won't be surprised to read, does a million things that would take ten pages to list. She wants books she reads to be well written, help her understand the universe and impact the rest of her life positively. She has chosen a nice quote to share with you from her current read, *The Checklist Manifesto* by Atul Gwande."

"Here, then is our situation at the start of the 21st Century: we have accumulated stupendous know-how. We have put it in the hands of some of the most highly trained, highly skilled, and hardworking people in our society. And, with it, they have indeed accomplished extraordinary things. Nonetheless, that know-how is often unmanageable. Avoidable failures are common and persistent, not to mention demoralizing and frustrating, across many fields—from medicine to finance, business to government. And the reason is increasingly evident: the volume and complexity of what we know has exceeded our individual ability to deliver its benefits correctly, safely, or reliably. Knowledge has both saved us and burdened us. That means we need a different strategy for overcoming failure, one that builds on experience and takes advantage of the knowledge people have but somehow also makes up for our inevitable human inadequacies. . . ." And you'll have to read the book to find out the strategy, or ask Margaret about it next time you see her."

Also, Dr. Gwande is featured as a TED speaker in [this video](#). TED is non-profit devoted to ideas worth spreading. They note on the [TED website](#), "We believe passionately in the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and ultimately, the world. So we're building here a clearinghouse that offers free knowledge and inspiration from the world's most inspired thinkers, and also a community of curious souls to engage with ideas and each other."

## Quotes

"We face very, very different economic futures, depending on how our schools develop. Other nations are investing in the education of their populations, and they're doing other things to make their economies better. We're no longer going to be *able* to assume we're at the forefront of the world, in terms of our economy."

*Eric Hanushek, Hoover Institute, Stanford University, Education Week*

Although the idea that not all graduates will go to college – so they don't need to take college-prep courses – strikes a chord with many, the reality is that whether students go to a four-year college or to other postsecondary training, they do, indeed, need the same rigorous academic preparation in high school. It's time to agree that all high school graduates deserve an opportunity to go to college if they choose. That should be our minimum expectation."

*Linda Murray, Superintendent in Residence for Education Trust*

“62% of all jobs in Iowa (1.1 million jobs) will require some postsecondary training beyond high school in 2018.”

[Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce](#)

“Most young people—whether they complete college or not—say the high school counseling system did not provide the kind of help and advice they need and want.”

*Public Agenda, One Degree of Separation: How Young Americans Who Don't Finish College See Their Chances for Success*

Learning is like rowing upstream. Not to advance is to drop back.

*Chinese Proverb*

Any questions about or ideas for this newsletter are welcome. Contact Susie Olesen via email ([Susie.Olesen@isfis.net](mailto:Susie.Olesen@isfis.net)) or phone ([641-745-5284](tel:641-745-5284)).