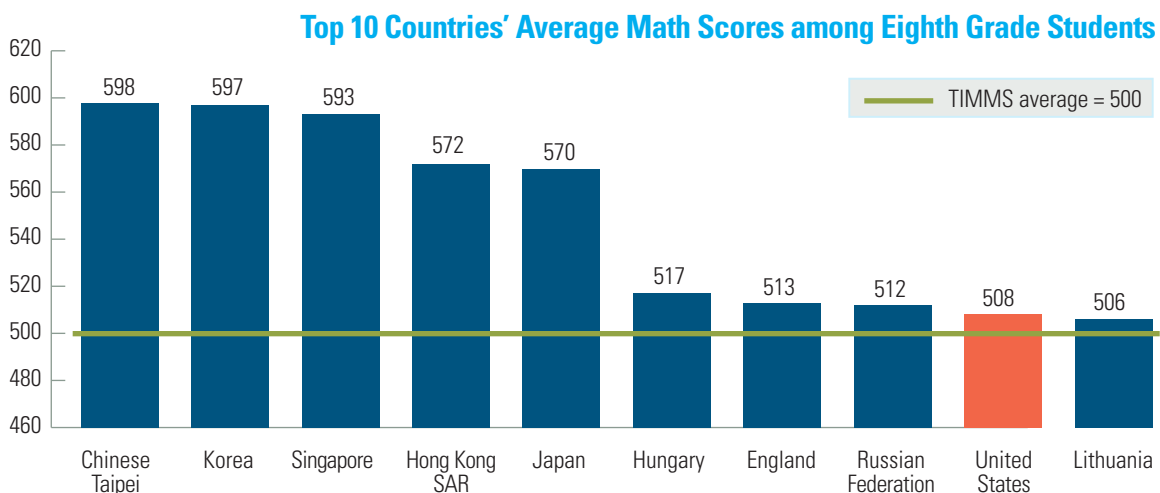


# Facts for Education Advocates

## International Comparisons

In recent years, there has been increasing attention paid to the internationalization of our world and the ways in which we are all connected. To truly understand our performance in any arena, but particularly in education, we must see how we compare with the rest of the world. This month, the Facts for Education Advocates considers international comparisons in education.

## Student Performance



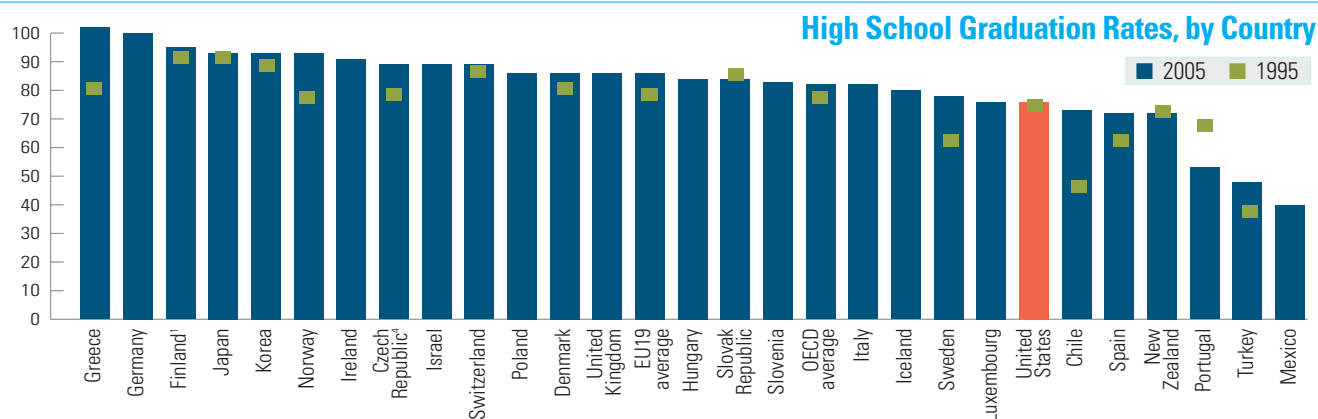
U.S. Department of Education. (2008). National Center for Education Statistics. *Highlights from TIMMS 2007* (NCES 2009-001). Washington, DC: Author.

- The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development compares and ranks student performance and other education indicators of its member countries. OECD data show that the student performance in the United States has remained steady, while in other countries it has improved, causing the United States' rankings to drop.
- In 2003, the United States ranked 15th of 29 OECD countries in reading literacy with a score 495, which is slightly below the OECD average of 500 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). A printing error invalidated the U.S. reading section of the 2006 Program for International Student Assessment, so the current U.S. standing is unknown.
- U.S. 15-year-olds scored below the OECD average in both mathematics and scientific literacy (OECD, 2007a). Out of students from 30 OECD countries, U.S. students rank behind 20 countries in scientific literacy and behind 24 countries in mathematics literacy.
- In the problem-solving portion of the OECD test, the U.S. ranked 24th of 29 OECD countries, with a score of 477 (23 points below the OECD average) (OECD, 2004).
- Half of American students fell below the threshold of problem-solving skills considered necessary to meet emerging workforce demands (OECD, 2004).
- There is a significant achievement gap in the United States. The United States has an average number of students who perform at the highest proficiency levels (9.1 percent; the OECD average is 9 percent), but a much larger proportion who perform at the lowest levels (24.4 percent; the OECD average is 19.2 percent). The United States is the only OECD member country to have relatively high proportions of both top and bottom performers (OECD, 2007a).
- The Trends in Mathematics and Science Study tests the performance of fourth- and eighth-grade students from a different group of countries than the OECD. The United States scored above the international average in both mathematics and science in 2007 in both age groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

# Facts for Education Advocates

## Educational Attainment

- In 24 OECD countries, the average lifetime educational expectancy is between 16 and 21 years. Australia and the United Kingdom have the highest educational expectancy (20.7 years), while the average in the United States is almost four years less (16.9 years). The United States is 20th of the 28 OECD countries (OECD, 2006).
- According to OECD's calculations, the United States' high school graduation rate (76 percent) is below the OECD average of 82 percent, and well below the graduation rates in Greece, Germany, Finland, Japan, Korea, Norway, and Ireland, all of which had graduation rates above 90 percent (OECD, 2007b).
- The United States ranks first among the 30 OECD countries for the percent of 55- to 64-year-olds who have a high school degree or equivalent. However, the United States drops to 11th among 25- to 34-year-olds. In contrast, Korea ranks 24th among 55- to -64-year-olds but first among 25- to 34-year-olds (OECD, 2006).



OECD PowerPoint: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (2007b). Education at a glance 2007: PowerPoint presentation. Accessed January 6, 2009. Available at [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/5/57/39367\\_723.ppt](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/5/57/39367_723.ppt)

## Postsecondary Education

- 39 percent of the adult population in the United States has attained a postsecondary degree — well above the OECD average of 31 percent (OECD, 2006).
- Between 1995 and 2005, the United States' postsecondary graduation rate increased slightly from 33 to 34 percent. This is below the OECD average (36 percent) and well below the highest rates of more than 45 percent reported by Australia, Iceland, Finland, New Zealand, Denmark and Poland (OECD, 2007b).
- Although the United States' graduation rates have remained steady over the last decade, other countries have improved at a faster rate. As a result, the United States' ranking has fallen from second of 17 OECD countries in 1995 to 16th of 27 OECD countries in 2005 (OECD, 2006).
- The United States has a comparatively low graduation rate, in part because the U.S. has the highest college dropout rate among OECD countries (OECD, 2007b).

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