

POLICY: Education

A Nation's best defense is an educated citizenry.

- Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826; 3rd President 1801-1809)

Defense from whom? Defense against *foreign* enemies needs only a capable elite, a credible armed force, and a war-chest; not necessarily an educated citizenry. So, Jefferson would educate a citizenry not only against any the outside threat but also against threat from *within*; against elites manipulating a population into a disenfranchised lifetime at the oars with little say on the direction of government. The Republic that the Revolution founded was to be a creature of the *people*, not of a king, or an elite, or a clergy; and education, for Jefferson, would be guardian of the Revolution. How successful that goal has been is a matter of opinion.

Historically, federal involvement in education has been sporadic and to meet specific needs. Thus had been the *GI Bill* (*Servicemen's Readjustment Act*) of 1944, the *National Defense Education Act (NDEA)* of 1958 and a range of equal rights measures under LBJ's *Great Society* programs in the 1960s. The *GI Bill* had greater impact on US education than any single measure; it enabled a generation of 16 million veterans into universities they would otherwise have had little chance of attending. *NDEA* aimed at the advancement of *science*, *mathematics*, and *foreign languages* when the US suddenly thought it had lost the world lead in key disciplines; it became law months after *Sputnik 1* had been launched in October 1957. The federal government then had little policy say in education until recently and in controversial circumstances. Some hard-line "*constitutionalists*" still claim the federal government has no part to play in education policy and to this day oppose the creation of the **US Department of Education (USED)** in 1979/1980 by "*President Jimmy Carter, Liberal-left Democrats and the radical teachers*". Of the best known federal policies at present, *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, the **John Birch Society** says "*The Bush administration's No Child Left Behind program represents one of the largest expansions of the federal government's unconstitutional invasion of education since Jimmy Carter's creation of the DOE in 1979.*"

This last twenty years of federal interest in education can be traced to the 1983 report "*A Nation at Risk*" by the Reagan-appointed *National Commission on Excellence in Education* which concluded the US schools system could not have been worse if it had been imposed by a hostile power¹. The sense that US international competitiveness was at risk – as indeed it was – led some to think of education as a *national* issue rather than something of only local and family concern. The report was alarmist but that was by design; in the Cold-War-speak of the day it said "*We have, in effect, been committing an act of*

NCLB (No Child Left Behind)

When the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* of 1965 was reauthorized in 2002, the Bush Administration included new conditions that tied federal funding to measures such as "adequate yearly progress." Under *NCLB*, schools getting *Title I* funds are required to offer students a *transfer* to other schools if they fall short of annual assessment goals for two consecutive years, and to offer a choice of *tutoring* services to low-income parents if they fall short for three years. The administration acknowledged in 2006 that *NCLB* is not working as well "for parents" as it should. GAO reports that only 2% of students eligible take advantage of transfers to another school and only 19% of the 2.2 million eligible for tutoring take advantage of it. One reason for this may be that – allegedly -- many schools are reporting *test scores* late so many parents don't find out they have a right to transfer until the new school year has begun. Opponents of *NCLB* say that schools are doing all they can and that schools are not being given additional funding to achieve the raised expectations of the initiative; they say "no child left behind" is a *political slogan* rather than a promise to improve national education.

¹ Factual material here and elsewhere is from *Public Agenda*. A selected list of all sources is at the end.

unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament"; the US was threatened not by a Red Tide but a “*rising tide of mediocrity*”. President Reagan suggested that vouchers, prayer in schools, and abolition of the new USEd would fix all of the ills. Twenty years later a polarized debate continues; some claim that US schools are still awash with mediocrity: others such as the Constitutionlists say the 1983 report was based on biased or falsified data and is a stalking horse for implanting universal liberal-left values in schools. But what has changed in schools over the last twenty years? If **NAEP** (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores are a guide, not much. There has been some relative improvement in science results but all key disciplines are worse than or equal to scores thirty years ago. Despite the detail – and debate is heated on the validity of comparing scores over time – one element that remains from the 1983 report, to the chagrin of some, is that education is an issue in the national domain. With NCLB, federal involvement in local education was codified, in good monetarist manner. Schools receiving federal funds were made measurable and accountable under federal testing.

The Purpose

Is school simply *child care*, or protective custody, or a scheme to keep children off the streets? Is the real purpose of school to create docile factory workers who know how to do their job, and little else? Or is school a determiner of social cohesion, the place where each citizen learns intellectual creativity, learns how to learn, and how to share information? Are some schools dedicated to perpetuating a national elite and others to producing those who will serve the elite. Or are schools dedicated to the national interest through equity, creativity, and preparing each student for life-long learning in a multicultural, multilingual, globalized world?

The only certainty is that no national educational system will succeed unless the people and the government first agree on the purpose and priorities of education.

Measuring Education

What in education can be reliably measured and be accounted for, and what makes a difference? Thinking on this is distinguished by the relative weight placed on *standards, methods, funding, market forces*.

Standards

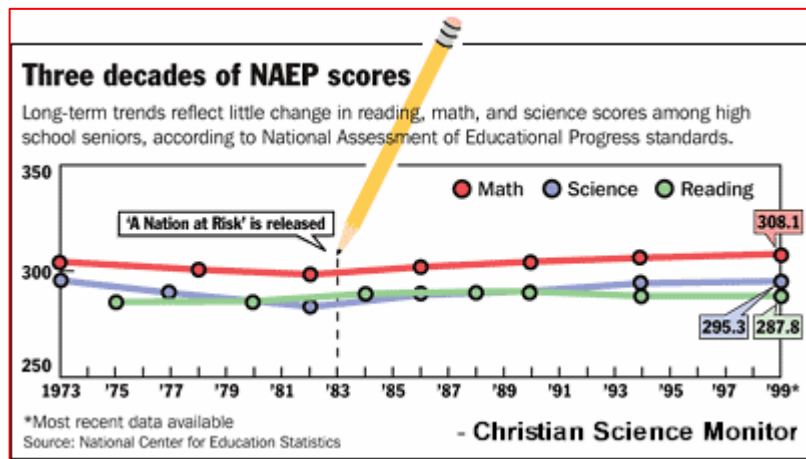
It is self-evident that schooling should bear some result and testing is the only straightforward way to indicate this. An unfortunate but vivid metaphor questioning testing is “*A pig doesn’t grow just because you keep weighing it.*” But the ripost is “*You can’t tell whether the pig is growing if you don’t weigh it.*” Testing is so integral to education that education without testing in some form seems meaningless. Through testing, the teacher can tell which students or areas of work need more effort and – crucially for modern government funding –

Nationalization of Standards (NAEP)

Although schools have traditionally been operated at a local level in the US, in the 1960s there were moves to get a *conspectus* of US education so that each district could share its approach and experience with others. This was articulated by *James Conant*, sometime president of *Harvard*, in *Shaping Education Policy* (1964) which called for a mechanism that would “give voice to the diverse interests, needs and traditions of states” and “enable them to cooperate and communicate with one another”. Clearly the time was ripe – within two years 50 states and the US Congress had agreed to the *Compact for Education* and the creation in 1967 of the *Education Commission of the States (ECS)*. This coincided with moves towards a *national student assessment* system. A broad panel of experts had developed a suitable test that would later become the *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)* but there was suspicion the test would increase federal power over local education and be one step towards a *national curriculum*. In 1969 NAEP testing became official and was put in the hands of the new federal-state **ECS**. Fourteen years later, **NAEP** was removed from **ECS** – decimating the organization – and entrusted to a new non-profit private body, *Educational Testing Service (ETS)* which administers **NAEP** for the *National Center for Education Statistics*. The *Commissioner of Education Statistics* in the **USEd** is required by law to administer the NAEP program. It measures students in **grades 4, 8, and 12** across the US in key subjects.

higher authorities can get an indication of which teachers and entire schools need more effort. But the downside of formalized testing, say educators, is that students learn and teachers teach “for the test”. Also, two or four years hard work by both student and teacher – and the fortunes of both – are made to depend on a “high-stakes” tests, a form of educational Russian roulette. The *SAT* (Scholastic Assessment Test) or *ACT* (American College Test) have become the rite of passage for the majority of US high-school students. Tests such as this bring about suicides in some places such as **Japan** and many claim they are cruel and unnatural ways of passing academic judgement on a student. Policy-makers, teachers, parents and others who have been through high-stakes testing themselves tend to see more virtue than vice in the process but there will always be room to consider fairer methods such as averaging of a number of tests and trying to make allowance for students who are greatly stressed by the formal testing as such. But testing, measurement and setting of standards is immensely practical for several purposes. It allows *merit* to show itself independent of any personal particular, favoring a Jeffersonian meritocracy over hereditary oligarchy. Also, as shown in recent years, it allows policy-makers to take some objective measure of standards across the country and can reveal shortcomings that should be revealed. The recent addition of an *essay* question to *SAT* (and *ACT*) brought the **biggest dip in aggregate scores in over 30 years**, showing that multiple-choice and short-answer testing can hide that which should not be hidden.

The *NCLB* initiative has exposed the politics and social theory that is always just below the surface in education. The Bush administration has applied the purest *monetarist* praxis in saying why should taxpayers continue to fund (*Title I*) schools that are not performing? Teachers in those schools and others say how can performance improve without funding? In the middle ground, there is now a nexus between funding and outcomes which in



some way will probably remain and a debate will continue on how local needs and national interest can both be maximized. *NAEP* has put school standards in the headlines to an extent not seen before and, surprisingly for the conservative administration that promulgated it, the notion of *national standards* now begs the question of *national curriculum*.

Standards, like motherhood and apple-pie, are a “good thing”. But in turning to detail, the debates begin. Some think national standards are just a step away from a national curriculum (as in **France**, and many other countries) – a worthy goal to some, anathema to others. Some say standards, tests and measures are just a small part of education and the standards probed in *NAEP*, *ACT* and *SAT* are just a dumbing-down of what education should be for the needs of commerce, a tool of a “*Pedagogy of Oppression*” that reinforces the worst of the 19th century “factory model of schooling”.

Methods

Some say that education is not the transmission of *facts* but the transmission of *methods*. What this means varies tremendously from discipline to discipline. Mathematics of its nature teaches students about solving problems by type, but history, geography, literature often do not make clear that the student is learning critical skills rather than “the 10 causes of World War I”, or just that country, or just that great novel or that work of Shakespeare. This hits the nub what it is to be a “good teacher” or a “good student”. A good student is fortunate enough to see the curriculum as just examples of the subject; a good teacher is skilled and diligent enough to produce as many students as possible with that insight. Seeing education as a method and not just facts also prepares the student for a life of changing facts and for more

sophisticated post-secondary studies. The student or the parent who asks *What good is it later in life to know the rivers of France?* hasn't dug it. Life in today's globalized information-based world is about learning new skills and assimilating new facts continually. That can only be taught and practiced by assimilating fact sets and understanding systems of thinking, and then doing it some more until those cognitive processes are well-honed. Similarly if a **foreign language** is taught along with some formal linguistics (*Chomsky Deep Structure*, etc), the student will learn not only some aptitude in that language but also *how to learn* any language. Education with this emphasis costs more. **Qualitative** tests, rather than quantitative, are far costlier to set and to assess. Machines can assess multiple-choice tests at a fraction of the cost it takes an educator to read and assess an answer for clarity of **critical thinking**, method of attacking the problem, and comprehension of the issues. Emphasis in this way on method produces students more likely to find learning new things a rewarding experience; they will know what to do when confronted with new problems – they will research, try the methods they know and learn new methods if those don't work. They will have the skills to leverage their natural human intelligence. Importantly, they will also be able see the range of positions in an issue, the different points of view in religious, cultural, national, social questions and will never feel threatened because the world of ideas is their natural habitat. This, rather than rote learning, has resonance with Jefferson's **educated citizenry**.

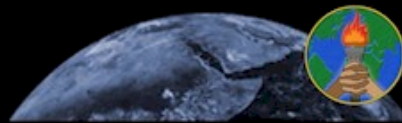
Funding

If You Think Education is Expensive, Try Ignorance

- Derek Bok, (1930- ; President Harvard Univ 1971-1990)

Another perspective says education is all about **money**; the more you spend, the better the outcome. Whether or not this is true, a corollary probably is -- the poorest students at the neediest schools with teachers who would prefer to be elsewhere get the worst education. Educational miracles against all odds do happen but, statistically, poor funding is related to poor outcome. This is why the NCLB measure of reducing funding to needy schools that fail to improve has attracted such scathing attacks from those who say struggling schools need more support, not less. More money is helpful in any endeavor but actual **expenditures per pupil per year** (PPE) and **results**, measured by high school **graduation**, do not show a strong correlation. **Iowa** with PPE of \$8,405 ranks *first* in graduation with 93%; **Georgia** with a higher PPE of \$8,623 ranks *last* in graduation with 54%. **New Jersey** has the *highest* PPE (\$12,959) but ranks 18th with 75% graduation; **Mississippi** has the *lowest* PPE of \$5,890 and ranks 44th with 62%. A broader measure, **achievement**, as scored by *Center for Education Reform* based on **SAT**, **ACT**, and **NAEP** scores, ranks **Minnesota** (\$9,697 PPE) *first* and **Mississippi** (\$5,890 PPE) *last*. A special case is **DC** which ranks *last* in assessment but *first* in PPE (\$15,489) and almost *last* in graduation rate (59%). These facts alone provides talking points for *both* sides in the funding debate – the schools with highest PPE have better outcomes than those with the lowest (“funding is good”), but higher PPE does not invariably lead to better outcomes (“funding is not the full story”). DC should be ignored in all arguments but it doubtless encourages those who claim funding without accountability leads to peculiar circumstances. Across the US, PPE (on a dollar-adjusted basis) has more than doubled over the last 30 years. However, the **proportion** of government spending on education is also not necessarily a guide to relative outcomes; the countries shown include both high and low technology achievers, developing and developed, with no obvious correlation across a range of 9% to 19% of government expenditure.

Federal funding is only about 8% of around \$550B that is spent throughout the US on elementary and secondary education in 2005/2006, but these small federal monies are spent in key areas and in leading edge programs that often have leveraged impacts throughout the system. For 2006/2007 **Title I** real funding has decreased for 90% of schools. This comes at a time when schools say they are under increased load imposed by NCLB requirements but is in line with the general budget austerity brought by the President's goal of cutting the deficit in half by 2009 and emergent security and war costs overseas.



Cuba	19.4%	(pre-primary 9%, primary 32%, secondary 39%, tertiary 21%)
South Africa	18.1%	(pre-primary 10%, primary 40%, secondary 36%, tertiary 14%)
US	17.1%	[no breakdown]
Australia	13.3%	(primary 33%, secondary 41%, tertiary 25%)
China	13.0%	(primary 34%, secondary 38%, tertiary 27%)
Russia	12.3%	[no breakdown]
UK	11.5%	[no breakdown]
Japan	10.5%	(pre-primary 3%, primary 35%, secondary 40%, tertiary 22%)
Germany	9.7%	
Indonesia	9.0%	(primary 39%, secondary 42%, tertiary 19%)

Government Spending on Education - % of All Government Spending UNESCO / OSS.NET

Market Forces

Another emphasis – rather than *standards, methods or funding* – is to allow the famous invisible hand of the market to improve public education. In this theory, public schools have difficulties and do not improve because they have no *competition*. If government gave parents vouchers allowing the child to attend any school, public or private, each public school would improve, or would close down for lack of students. Elements of this "**school choice**" policy are already part of NCLB. *Milwaukee* and *Cleveland* have already tried to include *private and religious schools* in voucher plans and *Cleveland* won a US Supreme Court challenge against it that cited *separation of church and state*. There is a widely held-belief that private schools do a better job for students than public schools, but in academic standards there is little to support this belief. In recent standardized tests, private schools did no better than public schools and some private schools (and charter schools) with good reputations failed to meet national standards. Private schools do however often do better in other important matters such as discipline, safety, teacher-student ratios. There are also the tacit social advantages of a "good school".

Parents

Parents are the first, most important, and most formative of teachers. Parents teach the child the language, how to eat, how to sleep, how to interact with others. It is parents that set the context for responsibility, inquisitiveness, and other traits of character without which no degree of schooling and socialization will succeed. Although systems of *nannies* and *boarding schools* seemed to have served British elites well for generations, a population comprising one-income two-parent families has historically proven to be the fundamental building block for a stable, low-crime society. Educational policy must therefore complement *family policy* as well as *health, immigration, labor, taxation* and other policies. Those social conditions, together with an efficient world-class educational system, made equitable irrespective of where the child lives, will give the nation's children equal opportunity to grow, learn, and contribute to society and America's place in the world.

Teachers

An element often forgotten in considering funding, curricula, methods and the place of school in society, is the *teacher*. "We know nothing helps a child learn as much as a great teacher," says Secretary of Education *Spellings*. But attempts to quantify this invariably fail. NCLB will enforce standards of *teacher qualification* but nothing can systematically produce what every fortunate student knows to be a "good teacher", that ineffable talent that imparts not facts but a facility with a discipline and the desire to learn more. Discussion of *merit pay* for good teachers in the US and elsewhere have ground to halt because it is too difficult to formalize and/or presents teachers' unions with the dangerous precedent of recognizing qualities beyond the job description.

Socialization

Educated citizens are better citizens. The *social* role of schools in preparing citizens for life is so pervasive as to be often unnoticed. K-12 provides social experience beyond the family and – if all goes well -- skills just as important for life in society as academic skills. But this is an art of balance. For some students, school is little more than social life and in worst cases it can be a direct link to crime, violence, drugs of addiction, pregnancy and/or death. This socializing aspect places immense, unremunerated burden on teachers who have trained to teach not to be social workers, child-minders, or wardens. Further to this vital socializing role, schools also play another direct economic role as *de facto* child-minding centers. The massive increase in two-income families throughout the developed world would not have been possible if children were not absent at school for part of the day for part of the year for 10 or 12 years. This is a social *value* of schools that is not included when governments consider the *cost* of schools. The socializing value of schools grows more important by the year in an increasingly *multi-cultural* world. School takes the child beyond the family into a microcosm of US society which is in turn a slice of the wider world. In the 1960s, schools in some areas were a sad proxy for the segregation wars, the result of “America’s birth defect” as Secretary of State Rice puts it. Schools have played an invaluable role for wider US society in helping to heal the defect. The high school *dropout rate* among *Blacks* has fallen from almost 30% in 1970 to the aggregate of 10% but dropout rates among *Hispanics* has remained steady at around 25% to 30%. The *White* dropout rate has fallen from around 12% to around 6% over the period.

Post-Secondary

K-12 schooling is a preparation for life in society, but in practice it is commonly preparation for colleges, universities and other post-secondary education and the higher earning power that higher education offers. In 1900, about 2% in the US attended post-secondary education; around 65% attend today. Of 12 million post-secondary students, about 44% attend community colleges which offer an increasing range of competency-based training courses, continuing education, adult education, and general interest (“hobby”) courses. Fees at community colleges are often little more than nominal but fees for US universities are among the highest in the world, from around \$4,000 per year for state universities to almost \$20,000 per year in “ivy league” universities, substantially more for degrees such as medicine. Generally, students graduate with thousands of dollars of debt in government student loans, an aggregate of around \$17,000. The well-trodden secondary / post-secondary path is still not perfect. The *National Center for Education Statistics* says 30% of all new post-secondary students need some form of *remedial* learning to fit them to their new studies, suggesting some systematic shortcomings with secondary schooling.

The Future?

The child is father of the man.

- William Wordsworth (1807)

Diversity is a blessing in diet and the world of ideas but it is difficult to find any intrinsic virtue in the diversity found in the US school system. K-12 education is a one-time experience formative in the life of each child and nothing, particularly the pet theories of a state or a school district, should stand between that and a world-class education. But *localism* runs deep in the US to an extent that puts it in contrast to all other developed (and developing) nations. The Bush administration has contributed, perhaps unintentionally, towards standardization by creating accountability based on national standards, one of the major recommendations of the controversial *A Nation at Risk* report.

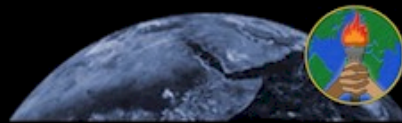
There are a multitude of school administration details that could and should be arranged locally but there seems little reason to teach a different history or chemistry in each school district. “*There is not one kind of math in North Carolina and another kind in New York or California. The science that our children need to know is the same in North Carolina as it is in London and Singapore and Bombay.*” The only objection to a broad national curriculum is *localism*, a distrust that some say derives from King George

250 years ago but more likely stems from the *Old Testament* venomous distrust of all authority except God. It is conceivable that a national curriculum could be developed by a council of the wise representing all stakeholders, perhaps under the aegis of the *Education Commission of the States*, but implementing even a broad multiple-choice national curriculum would precipitate a heated, polarizing debate spanning several years. For instance, debate on how *Evolution / Intelligent Design* would be incorporated in a curriculum could stalemate any panel for decades – confirming the role of the *Old Testament* in US policy-making – but some wise way should and could be found to satisfy all parties in the national interest. NCLB aims for 100% proficiency in the 3Rs (*Reading-Riting-Rithmatic*) by 2014, meaning by then no American school-child would fall below the grade of “proficient”. This is a noble policy but not qualitatively different to that of countries with a bigger task such as **Indonesia**. Concentration on the lowest aggregate may produce another generation of process workers who can read but distracts attention and resources away from the Jefferson goal of an *educated citizenry*, a qualitatively different population.

Unarguably, this is the *Age of Information* but that has been the case for 30 years; we are now moving into an era beyond information, into contact with the last element of the familiar *Data – Information – Knowledge* - ... hierarchy. The last element is often shown as *Wisdom*, but *Conceptualization* or *Imagination* also convey what “applied knowledge” entails. Wisdom is the ethical use of knowledge. To some extent values, and ethical praxis, can be taught but they are best self-realized within an education system that encourages free-thinking and critical thought. It is a long way from *No Child Left Behind* to free-thinking conceptualization but it is a transition the US must make to survive. By placing education in a national context perhaps NCLB is a modest step in the right direction.

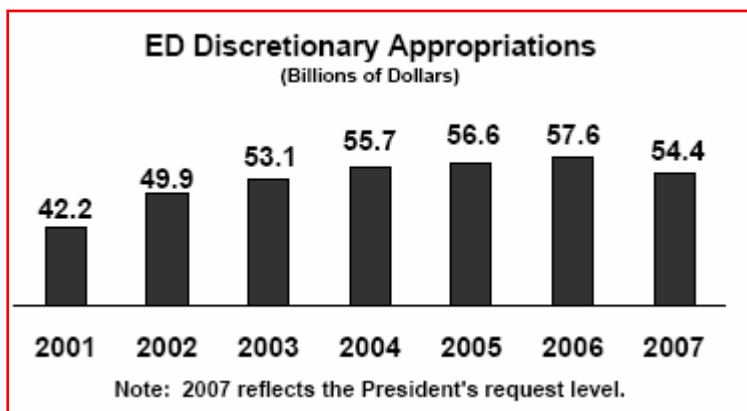
Wired Education

The Information Age offers options in education which are not “soft options” but new highly leveraged and cost-effective educational possibilities. The *World Wide Web* has already shown the immense value of connection to a world of information but now this connectedness means access to a burgeoning range of *online learning, student-paced autonomous learning, peer-to-peer learning groups, and just-in-time fact acquisition*. The pedagogical techniques evolved in decades past in *distance learning* and *correspondence schools* can be readily adapted to web-based education in virtually all areas. Courses dependent on detailed demonstration can meet some of that requirement with *computer simulation, virtual reality*, and serious *games*. These possibilities at present are applicable largely to post-secondary courses but inevitably, funds permitting, there will scope to offer elementary and secondary course-work via the *Web* for the disabled, the remote, or where parents have a zealous belief in *home schooling*. Wired education in its many possible forms offers students, schools, colleges, universities and the government the opportunity of multiplying the returns for each education dollar spent and a new order of equal opportunity to the isolated, the disabled, the poor, and the very busy. However, as with any prolonged engagement with computers (or mobile phones), these new modes of education miss the *socialization* element of institutionalized instruction. On the downside, large numbers of better educated *sociopaths* may be produced. One downside has already appeared. The very poor results from the recent inclusion of *essay* questions in SAT showed the danger of neglecting traditional skills but it also showed that US children are longer taught to *write*. Only 15% of the SAT essays were written in *curative* writing - - the rest were printed in block letters. This in itself may or may not be alarming but it does demonstrate how easily basics can be forgotten in pursuit of the new. Crucially, little of this brave new world of universal, cheap, quality educational possibilities will be of use if students have not been taught *how to learn* and to research, the heuristics and pedagogical tricks of each discipline. This emphasizes again the importance of sound grounding in K-12



National Security

A Nation at Risk foretold a decline in economic competitiveness and a generalized disassembly of US society. Only the most light-hearted could put an entirely positive spin on the looming economic triumphs of **China** (shortly followed by **India**). In many senses this was the competitive disaster foretold. Jobs of all descriptions are now being exported to China. Direst of all, the talent for innovation and America's secret – vast capital – are also now growing offshore. Certainly, many nominally US businesses and entrepreneurs are sharing in the China boom but the US heartland is seeing only loss and de-skilling. The Report was written in the context of the US maintaining its lead as the leading superpower against the devious Soviets who were still able to do good science (and espionage) in appalling economic conditions. The Report then knew nothing about *stateless asymmetric terrorism*, despite the hints of the *Munich Olympics* (1972), the bombings, assassinations and kidnappings by the **Baader-Meinhof Red Army Fraction** (1972-1993), thousands of violent acts by the Italian **Brigate Rosse** during the 1970s, or **Russia's** loss to guerillas in **Afghanistan** (1979-1988). The 21st century offers challenges to states, the US more than most, that were unimagined only a few years ago even by (or particularly by) the national security community.



Although the most recent education budget shows cuts in almost all areas of federal spending on education, the budget continues to put emphasis on mathematics and science in the interest of US global competitiveness. With the *multi-agency National Security Language Initiative* it aims to “significantly increase the number of American students learning foreign languages critical for *national security* and *global competitiveness*” (such as **Chinese** and **Arabic**). \$35M in the current budget is **USED's** portion of that initiative. In comparison, 20-times that (\$669M) is allocated to *English Language Acquisition* for immigrant children with limited English aptitude. *A Nation at Risk* stressed the US lack of language skills almost 20 years ago and clearly not much has been done since – in 2006 just 33 of 12,000 **FBI** agents have proficiency in **Arabic**. It is not possible to have a smart nation – and a smart intelligence and security community – with a dumb education system and now more than ever national competitiveness and national security will depend on how many smart people can be given the education they deserve. In 2006, only 15% of US graduates are in the science / engineering fields; in China this is 50%. The intelligence community, among its many tasks, is faced with appreciating some 600,000 terabytes of data appearing on the internet each day. Nothing short of an initiative of the scale of the *Manhattan Project* will have any success.

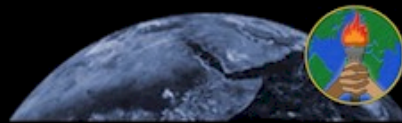
... / Forecast

Near-Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
<p>After 23 years, many of the alarms in "A Nation at Risk" are still unheeded. The "rising tide of mediocrity" is still lapping at the foundations of US society. At its best, US education equals the best in the world but the vast rump of the system is directionless, unable to change as fast as a fast-changing world and lacking leadership to set new goals. But change is beset with a more basic problem; there is no single cohesive educational system to lead or improve. Any reform will be no easier than herding cats unless states and school districts recognize a common purpose. The arduous task to gain <i>consensus</i> devoid of social agendas should start now.</p>	<p><i>Assessment</i> is important but not for its own sake. It is important to <i>measure what matters</i>, not how well students have been trained for the test. The system is suffering from change fatigue already and any future changes to curricula or testing – even obviously necessary ones – should come with only the widest possible consensus of educators with an eye on world's best practice. It is not idealism but a necessity to transition from simplistic fact-learning to an exploratory, critical thinking, civic-minded environment. "Why was Paris built here?" is more instructive than learning exact dates and facts.</p>	<p>In the longer term, fruits of a more robust and challenging education system should emerge. The time will be taxing enough for the US to use all the best skills it can muster. It is not possible to have <i>innovation</i>, and smart <i>security</i> and <i>intelligence</i> systems arising out of a dumb (or mediocre) nation. The "war on terror" has shown that the new shrinking world is more complex than military solutions alone. Wisdom and foresight and lucid understanding of foreign societies - <i>multicultural intelligence</i> – will be the main foundation for survival. These skills can be only be produced by an enlightened education system.</p>

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Selected sources

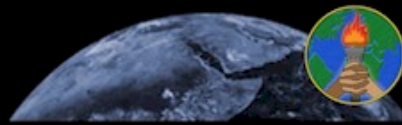
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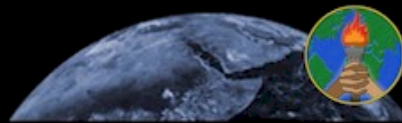
Hazard Level

Change Codes
↓ Deteriorated
• Steady
↑ Improved
↗ Alert

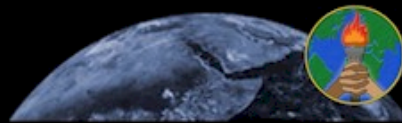
week-ended	See daily list of news items
2007 Jul 01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Genuine <i>diversity</i> in US schools is still elusive; "critics say the plans are mere proxies for <i>affirmative action</i>, serving no purpose other than to up minority representation among students. That makes them <i>constitutionally suspect</i> ... "-- Can Schools Still Achieve Diversity?.
2007 Jun 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$8.7 Million in Grants Awarded for Critical Foreign Language Instruction -- "the grants are intended to address the shortage of <i>critical foreign language speakers</i> by supporting new and expanded programs in grades K-12." The first-ever federal "report card" on state implementation of the <i>Disabilities Education Act</i> finds <u>80%</u> of states are below requirements. A checklist on the <i>NCLB</i> "warnings" system -- How 'No Child' forces schools into restructuring. <i>Merit pay</i> is a sensible idea but fraught with problems when more closely considered; "this is a complex process of changing a culture, and it will fail if teachers don't support it." -- Long Reviled, Merit Pay Gains Among Teachers.
2007 Jun 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to summarize but see links to stories in this topical area]
2007 Jun 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A study by the nonpartisan Center on Education Policy shows an improvement in <i>basic skills scores</i> and a closing in the <i>ethnic gap</i>, but skeptics doubt that is due to <i>NCLB</i> or that improvements outweigh the problems caused by the new law -- Scores Up Since 'No Child' Was Signed.
2007 Jun 03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Students today do not have a reasonable chance of becoming ready for <i>college</i> unless they take a number of <u>additional</u> <i>higher-level courses</i> beyond the minimum" -- Core Classes Not Enough, Report Warns.
2007 May 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "You have to question the <i>accountability system</i> when <u>100%</u> of your schools are going to be failing, by definition."; <i>Washington</i> is still not listening -- How to Fix No Child Left Behind.
2007 May 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to summarize but see links to stories in this topical area]
2007 May 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to summarize but see links to stories in this topical area]
2007 May 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to summarize but see links to stories in this topical area]
2007 Apr 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to summarize but see links to stories in this topical area]
2007 Apr 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to summarize but see links to stories in this topical area]
2007 Apr 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nine US states have taken a small step towards <i>common standards</i> with a <i>shared curriculum and test</i> for <i>Algebra II</i>.
2007 Apr 08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education policy in the US is dead in the water; "decision-makers have 'talked the talk'; now we should insist that they 'walk the walk'" -- Reform's Missing Ingredient.
2007 Apr 01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senator Hillary Clinton has criticized funding of private <i>tutors</i> under <i>No Child Left</i>



	<p><i>Behind</i> law – many large operations doing a lucrative trade in tutoring have close ties to Republicans.</p>
2007 Mar 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A thorough reform of the Venezuelan school system is next on President Chávez's agenda and he has appointed his brother as education minister – "<u><i>We have to create new values, and new values are created through education.</i></u>" The UK has plans for user reviews of schools – like <i>Amazon</i> book-ratings -- to help families identify which schools are most suitable for their children.
2007 Mar 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Democrats are intent on "softening" inequities in the No Child Left Behind law, but the very role of the federal government in schooling is also on the table. The <i>Maryland State Card</i> may assist (there and elsewhere) in comparing schools apples-to-apples fashion for funding -- "<i>it's designed to provide an immediate start to the discussion of what high schools look like and what should be done</i>"
2007 Mar 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The "<i>dumbing-down of America</i>" say some – the latest test scores for US high school students have hit a new <u>40-year low</u>. Kerala, site of the first elected communist government in the world in 1957, tops the Indian Educational Development Index, followed closely by <i>Delhi</i> and <i>Tamil Nadu</i>.
2007 Mar 05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to summarize but see links to stories in this topical area]
2007 Feb 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some schools are considering extending school hours and/or the school year -- one solution for schools that fail to meet NCLB goals may be to extend their contact hours. Schools in Fairfax are defying requirements under NCLB and could lose millions in grants. The Miami-Dade school board has approved the STAR teacher bonus plan -- "<i>under this plan, it will be testing, testing, testing ... It's a punishment, not an incentive.</i>"
2007 Feb 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers in Broward and their union condemn the proposed <i>Special Teachers Are Rewarded</i> program, known as STAR, leaving the question what is a "good teacher", and is it measurable?
2007 Feb 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes are expected [needed] to No Child Left Behind -- "<i>The aim is to inject more common sense into the law ...</i>" – for example, including special needs children in a school's aggregate was immensely stupid.
2007 Feb 05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the UK more schools will be able to teach not just languages like French, German and Spanish, but Mandarin, Urdu and Arabic as well. Education experts in Illinois have urged the governor to increase charter public school funding -- "<i>Charter public schools are public schools first and foremost, but the state capital funding ban treats charter public school students unequally</i>". Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega has promised access to schooling for all -- "<i>We are lifting the public school sector from the neo-liberal market.</i>"
2007 Jan 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> President Bush has proposes adding private school vouchers to the 'No Child' law -- "<i>What do we do for kids trapped in schools that continue to under-perform?</i>"
2007 Jan 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new House has voted to reduce rates on student loans -- "<i>the action was only a small piece of what House Democrats hope to do to reduce the cost of higher education.</i>" The world is falling behind on the 2015 education goal -- "<i>we're not going to come close to making 'education for all' by 2015.</i>"
2007 Jan 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The NCLB law is does not offer any acceptable way to define what a "highly qualified" teacher is -- "<i>It's not a process that gets at the fundamental issues of quality or effectiveness.</i>"



2007 Jan 08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A website by the National Council on Teacher Quality promises to shine a light on teachers' <i>working conditions</i>. The incoming DC Mayor will "reduce the authority of the Board of Education and require the schools superintendent to <i>report directly to the mayor</i>." [A lone mayor adjusts deckchairs on the <i>Titanic</i> of US education when all comparable nations have nation-wide standards.]
2007 Jan 01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "<i>San Francisco is in its sixth year of a weighted student formula and school choice and is the highest performing urban district in the state.</i>" The <i>New York Times</i> condemned "bumping" <i>less-effective teachers</i> on into schools that can least afford them -- "<i>a long and shameful history of dumping its least effective, least qualified teachers into the schools that serve the neediest children.</i>" A British MP writes "the writing is on the wall – <i>computer games</i> rot the brain" -- "<i>...only the twitching of their hands showing they are still conscious. These machines teach them nothing. They stimulate no ratiocination, discovery or feat of memory.</i>"
2006 Dec 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use it or Lose it; education (including lifelong education) may be the best prevention for <i>Alzheimer's</i> -- "a mere 5% increase in the <i>cognitive</i> reserve in the general population would prevent one third of Alzheimer's cases."
2006 Dec 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to summarize but see links to stories in this topical area]
2006 Dec 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A study by the <i>KPMG Foundation</i> finds the cost of UK children leaving elementary school <i>unable to read</i> is around \$4B; extrapolation to the US is probably valid, and alarming. In Mali [indicative of numerous places throughout the world] <i>Islamic schools</i> are meeting a hunger for <i>literacy</i>; and standards are high -- "<i>We always beat the state schools in exams.</i>"
2006 Dec 04	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to report]
2006 Nov 27	<p>↓ Despite all the schools policy, "The gaps between <i>African-Americans</i> and <i>whites</i> are showing very few signs of closing."</p>
2006 Nov 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The '<i>School of the Future World Summit</i>' in Philadelphia says the goal is to create "<i>well-rounded</i> members of tomorrow's <i>work force</i>".
2006 Nov 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to report]
2006 Nov 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> California schools will [electronically] <i>fingerprint</i> students for accounting in <i>the school lunch program</i> but "It just sounds kind of creepy."
2006 Oct 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [nothing significant to report]
2006 Oct 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A UK study says <i>TV with sub-titles</i> will help children to <i>read</i>; Finland has the highest reading scores of any children because it imports a lot of English language programs and they are sub-titled. UK research probably relevant to education everywhere revealed: "The average age of <i>puberty</i> has been falling for 150 years and dropped by as much as three years in the past 100."
2006 Oct 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With UNDP assistance, every pupil in Libya will get a laptop <i>computer</i> and <i>web access</i>; 1.2 million computers. There is a downside to the <i>keyboard</i> Age -- only 15% of essays introduced in the 2006 SAT exams were written in <i>cursive</i> -- the rest were printed in block letters. In Australia, the organization representing Defense families has backed the federal education minister's recent call for a single <i>national school curriculum</i> [This is an advantage to families posted around the country].
2006 Oct 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A quarter of the top 100 best liberal arts colleges say SAT has outlived its usefulness and is no longer required for admission. President Bush is making reauthorization of <i>No Child Left Behind</i> a priority – "Everyone" agrees that <i>NCLB</i> could be improved" but in contrasting ways. 80% of



	<p>school districts report they have No Child Left Behind costs that are not covered by federal funding.</p> <p>In Australia, the organization representing Defence families has backed the federal education minister’s recent call for a <i>single national school curriculum</i>.</p>
2006 Oct 02	<p>↓ There was another <i>killing</i> in a US school – a principal.</p> <p><i>Charter schools</i> are scoring no better than public schools on the same <i>test</i>.</p>
2006 Sep 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A report has found that educated citizens are better citizens; that education level correlates with “civic health” and social participation.
2006 Sep 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [nothing significant to report]
2006 Sep 11	<p>↓ 80% of DC’s schools are below academic standard on the new <i>standardized test</i>, including some "high-performing" schools.</p>
2006 Sep 04	<p>↓ Some state student assessments are now so divergent from the <i>National Assessment of Educational Progress</i> that some educators want standards moved from states to a federal authority—a new-look <i>SAT</i> incorporating an essay section has produced a drop in average scores—the <i>Educational Testing Service</i> has taken three months to confess to stupendous incompetence.</p>
2006 Aug 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Pedagogy of Oppression”: As the "factory model of schooling" returns with a vengeance a radical rethink of the nature of public education is needed — although social factors outside schools are significant, the single most important factor is good, qualified teachers, but schools can not achieve this alone.
2006 Aug 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Averages in <i>ACT</i> tests are up but the <i>Science</i> results are appalling.
2006 Aug 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [nothing significant to report]
2006 Aug 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [nothing significant to report]
2006 Jul 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [nothing significant to report]
2006 Jul 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [nothing significant to report]
2006 Jul 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A study says that outcomes for public school and charter schools are much the same; the charter schools say their result would be better if not weighted downwards by pupils that public schools can’t help.
2006 Jul 10	<p>↓ The Education Department says only four states (Maryland, Oklahoma, Tennessee, West Virginia) conform to the No Child Left Behind law – the others face funding cuts.</p>
2006 Jul 03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government says succeed or change: teachers say assistance not punishment.
Commencement of Service	

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