



Business Roundtable*



NATIONAL GROUPS CO-HOST BRIEFING ON 2006 PISA RESULTS, ISSUE JOINT STATEMENT

WASHINGTON—The results of the 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were released this morning by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), showing that 15-year-old students in the U.S. continue to perform, in science and mathematics, at levels that demonstrate conclusively that far too many are unprepared for the global economy.*

The bottom line of the 2006 results is this: In relative terms, the U.S. ranked, among the 30 OECD member countries, 25th in mathematics and 21st in science. That places the 15-year-olds in the United States below the OECD member country average in both subjects, not because students are scoring at lower levels on the tests, but because other countries, including Poland and Estonia are moving higher.

American policies following World War II promoted and supported participation in secondary and higher education; as a result, the United States currently has the largest supply of high-level skills in its *adult* labor force of any country in the world. But other countries are rapidly catching up to or overtaking us, as they focus on improving their educational systems. OECD data from 2003 ranks the U.S. as 19th in high school graduation rates, below the OECD average. Other countries are sending larger proportions of their students to college, while the U.S.' rate of students who do not complete a degree is growing. **Vivien Stewart** of the Asia Society notes, "As these latest OECD indicators show, the global talent pool is increasing. We urgently need to develop a globally oriented world-class educational system to prepare students in the U.S. with the knowledge and skills to succeed."

Putting it another way, the National Governors Association's **Raymond C. Scheppach** points out that "Our students' performance today is the best indicator of America's global competitiveness tomorrow. The United States faces emerging challenges across the international marketplace. The countries that thrive in this new global, entrepreneurial, and knowledge-based economy will be those that have the most highly skilled and educated workforce."

The Alliance for Excellent Education, Asia Society, Business Roundtable, Council of Chief State School Officers, ED in '08, and the National Governors Association joined to co-host a briefing on the PISA results to provide a unique opportunity for media, policymakers, educators, the business community, and other concerned citizens to join an important discussion focused on improving the performance of U.S. students. **Gene Wilhoit** of the Council of Chief State School Officers explains that "The release of the 2006 PISA results is an important and worthwhile event. It provides all of us a unique opportunity to benchmark student learning in the United States with that of emerging and high-performing countries, to

* PISA also tests students in reading, but a printing error on the U.S. test booklets caused the OECD to invalidate the results for students in the U.S. No results were therefore reported for the United States.

learn from the progress of other nations, and to renew our commitment and search for ways to improve educational opportunity for all of our students.”

Even the highest achieving U.S. students on the 2006 assessment were either at or below the OECD average. Nine percent of students in the U.S. tested in the top two levels of achievement in science (the OECD average) and almost 8 percent were at those levels in math (below the OECD average of over 13 percent). These higher achievers are the most likely candidates to pursue careers in the fields of science or mathematics.

However, almost a quarter of the U.S. students tested demonstrated very low proficiency in science, and 28 percent scored at below the minimum math level for citizens’ to be able to participate fully in society and the labor market. In both subjects, the U.S. has a far greater percentage of students at these very low proficiency levels than is the average for OECD member countries as a whole.

Business Roundtable President **John J. Castellani**, learning of the numbers of students in the lowest performance levels, and noting that about two-thirds of students in this country fall into the middle rankings in science and math, questions the lack of outrage that accompanies these test results: “It is difficult to understand why mediocre achievement by U.S. teenagers on international math and science assessments produces less concern and outcry than mediocre performance by a football or basketball team. There is worldwide competition for people with strong backgrounds in math and science who have the analytic and problem-solving skills needed to create tomorrow’s innovations. We need to take a serious look at what the U.S. can learn from the education systems that routinely pass us by.”

PISA is administered triennially to 15-year-olds in participating countries and economies through OECD, and it relies on the leading experts in participating countries to develop valid comparisons across countries and cultures. In 2006, fifty-seven countries, making up close to 90 percent of the world economy, participated in the assessment. Many of those countries, although not the U.S., implement PISA both at national and state or regional levels, to provide more information to policymakers that will assist them in making better-informed decisions about ways to improve student achievement.

Roy Romer, former governor of Colorado and superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, now chairman of ED in ’08, knows the importance of high-level leadership to improving the educational outcomes for students. “These results reaffirm that America’s education system is in crisis and that there are lasting implications for our children, who are unprepared to enter an increasingly competitive global marketplace,” he says. “They underscore the need for the presidential candidates to show bold leadership, free from ideological constraints and the influence of special interests, to bring America out of this crisis back to a level competitive with top-performing countries.”

Former governor and congressman from West Virginia and current president of the Alliance for Excellent Education, **Bob Wise**, looks to policymakers and the public for many of the changes that must be made if America is to maintain its strong global and economic position. “The message from this international report for the U.S. Congress and every state official is that much of the world is improving education much faster than we are. Being internationally mediocre in the Olympics means only a loss of national pride; mediocre in PISA forecasts a loss of skilled jobs for U.S. citizens. These results should arouse the public and all elected leaders to learn PISA’s lessons—all students must be given a true world-class education where they graduate from high school truly prepared for college or the modern workplace. The current Congressional deliberations about renewing No Child Left Behind must be the first—but not last—step to improve these international rankings.”