

Subj: **NVC 100813 PIAAC Update and News Analysis**
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 From: lmclendon@naepdc.org

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PIAAC Update and News Analysis

Jeff Carter, NAEPDC Policy Consultant, provides the following PIAAC Update and News Analysis.

As everyone knows, the first set of results from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies was released early this morning by OECD. Here are some highlights of the U.S. press coverage:

Inside Higher Ed

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/10/08/us-adults-rank-below-average-global-survey-basic-education-skills>

The author of this piece, Megan Rogers, notes that while the U.S. comes out higher than average in terms of educational attainment, it ranks below average in basic literacy and numeracy skills. She writes that the report also found that socioeconomic background has a stronger impact on proficiency levels in the U.S. than in other countries.

Another difference: according to Rogers, the survey found that participation in adult education and training is more common in the United States than in other countries.

Rogers also cites at least one critic of the study: Grover Whitehurst, director at the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institute. Well, not a critic exactly—he just doesn't think the results are all that much to get worked up about, pointing to the small number of participating countries and the small U.S. sample size (5,000 adults were surveyed). He acknowledges, however, that the results are consistent with previous findings on adult literacy.

Finally, Rogers quotes David S. Baime, senior vice president for government relations and research at the American Association of Community Colleges, who says that community colleges “have an essential role in redressing this situation,” but bemoans **the lack of a “meaningful or effective national policy for adult education.”** (my emphasis)

The Washington Post - "U.S. adults lag most countries in literacy, math and computer skills"

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/us-adults-lag-most-countries-in-literacy-math-and-computer-skills/2013/10/07/c4654f54-2f91-11e3-8906-3daa2bcde110_story.html

The Post's story includes excerpt from Sec. Duncan's statement on the survey:

“These findings should concern us all,” Education Secretary Arne Duncan said in a written statement. “They show our education system hasn’t done enough to help Americans compete — or position our country to lead — in a global economy that demands increasingly higher skills.”

Duncan said the study highlights a group that has been “overlooked and underserved: the large

number of adults with very low basic skills, most of whom are working.” (my emphasis)

“Adults who have trouble reading, doing math, solving problems and using technology will find the doors of the 21st century workforce closed to them,” Duncan said. “We need to find ways to challenge and reach more adults to upgrade their skills.”

The New York Times - "U.S. Adults Fare Poorly in a Study of Skills"

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/08/us/us-adults-fare-poorly-in-a-study-of-skills.html>

The Times relied on just a single source for their article (other than quoting from Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's press release), Anthony Carnevale, director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce:

In the most highly educated population, people with graduate and professional degrees, Americans lagged slightly behind the international averages in skills. But the gap was widest at the bottom; among those who did not finish high school, Americans had significantly worse skills than their counterparts abroad.

“These kinds of differences in skill sets matter a lot more than they used to, at every level of the economy,” Dr. Carnevale said.

“Americans were always willing to accept a much higher level of inequality than other developed countries because there was upward mobility, but we’ve lost a lot of ground to other countries on mobility because people don’t have these skills.” (my emphasis)

Associated Press - "Lack of Worker Skills Threatens European Recovery"

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/spain-italy-lack-jobs-skills-needed-recovery-20502108>

The Huffington Post - "U.S. Adults Lag In Practical Workplace Skills"

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/us-adults-lag-most-countries-in-literacy-math-and-computer-skills/2013/10/07/c4654f54-2f91-11e3-8906-3daa2bcde110_story.html

Other Coverage:

This morning, a panel discussed the findings from PIAAC as part of the fourth annual NBC News Education Nation Summit. Panelists include Former Michigan Governor John Engler, (now President of the Business Roundtable); Dr. Freeman A. Hrabowski, III, President of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County; and Mary Isbister, President of GenMet Corporation and Vice Chair of the U.S. Manufacturing Council. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was also interviewed.

And at 2:30 PM EDT today, Andreas Schleicher, OECD Deputy Director for Education and Skills, will present results from the first round of PIAAC via webcast. You can register for the webcast at: <https://oecdwash.webex.com/oecdwash/onstage/g.php?t=a&d=662940785>.

Unfortunately, the NCES report that was supposed to accompany the OECD reports will NOT be released today as planned due to the shutdown. And a panel discussion at CAP on the report that was scheduled for Thursday has been canceled, also citing the shutdown as the reason. See:

<http://www.americanprogress.org/events/2013/10/03/76273/survey-of-adult-skills-and-its-implications-on-the-american-middle-class/>

Jeff

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Keep up the good work. Let me know when we can help.

NAEPDC

A Natural Resource For Adult Education State Directors and their Staff Members

Dr. Lennox L. McLendon, Executive Director

lmclendon@naepdc.org

www.naepdc.org

202.624.5250

202.624.1497 FAX

Dr. Lennox L. McLendon, Executive Director

National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, Inc
(The Adult Education State Directors' Training and Technical Assistance Office)

444 N. Capitol St., Suite 422

Washington, DC 20001

(202) 624-5250 office

(804) 314-6747 mobile

(202) 624-1497 FAX

lmclendon@naepdc.org

www.naepdc.org

Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.

Will Rogers

US humorist & showman (1879 - 1935)

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