

FREEDOMISM

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The United States has caught attention both nationally and internationally for lagging notoriously in education compared to similar developed nations. American students are notably less proficient at critical subjects such as mathematics, writing, science and reading than their Asian and European counterparts. This underperformance has heightened criticism of the U.S's public education system, with arguments that the current method of teaching students is ineffective and puts too much emphasis on testing rather than full comprehension of subjects.

| Subject | Ranking | Year and source |
|-------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Mathematics | 27 th | 2006 ^[1] |
| Science | 22 nd | 2006 ^[1] |
| Reading | 18 th | 2003 ^[2] |

1. "Educational Score Performance - Country Rankings." *Geographic.org Home Page - Geography, Climate, Countries, Maps, Flags, Population*. 2009. Web. 18 Sept. 2010. <http://www.geographic.org/country_ranks/educational_score_performance_country_ranks_2009_oecd.html>.

2. "International Reading Performance Rankings." *Put Our Kids First*. Put Our Kids First. Web. 18 Sept. 2010. <http://putourkidsfirst.com/kidsfirst/int_reading.asp>.

This is, for the most part, true. American schools have developed an unhealthy obsession with state-mandated standardized testing, which can determine the fate of a student's educational future in a mere two hours. These tests all but throw out all the progress a student has made in a year of schooling. Such methods of determine whether a student is able to progress onto the next grade level can be deceiving since they fail to recognize all the potential factors that can change the final grade. Intelligence and learning isn't completely shown through performance at school – education goes much deeper than that. Factors such as stress, the condition the student was in when the test was taken, cheating, the affects the testing environment had on the student and possible flaws in the curriculum can all contribute to lower test grades. Betting an entire year's worth of schooling on one day-long test is dangerous and can easily fail a student who was worthy of moving up on the education ladder.

Standardized reading and writing tests are notably ineffective. The writing prompts used in most standardized tests are mediocre, for use of a better word, and fail to realistically gauge a student's writing ability or creativity. Asking someone what their "favorite memory" is will not get as sophisticated or enthusiastic a response as asking them about a subject they actually care about. Since writing is fueled so greatly by emotion and interest, grading one's ability to write would be done most accurately by letting them write about a subject they feel passionately about. For standardized tests, this could be done by letting students come up with their own subject and write about it. Such a system would probably garner more passionate responses than some bland, insufferably boring "sterilized" prompt that absolutely nobody would care for.

Many critics have argued for standardized testing to be abolished in favor of a more comprehensive and year-based system. This would be a better strategy: it would take into account progress throughout the entire year, grading progress throughout each subject, rather than piling everything up into one test at the end. Students are prone to forgetting many parts of subjects as the year progresses; the things learned at the beginning of the year don't carry on to the end. This can affect performance on parts of standardized tests, which is why a series of smaller, more focused tests over the course of the year would be more effective.

An additional reason the United States is lagging in education is because of some states enforcing less rigorous and sometimes politically biased curriculums. Of particular controversy is the recent uproar in Texas over new history standards, which show strong political leanings to the right due to the unregulated power of the state's conservative education board to enforce new curriculums. Many states have attempted to replace education on evolution (which is both a theory and a fact) with creationism and "Intelligent Design". This attempt at breaking separation of church and state and injecting religion into science courses could possibly be a contributing factor to

the United States' low science ranking. Nations that rank above the U.S. in science (Australia, Canada and most of the EU) are secularized and have almost no controversy over the teaching of evolution. The blatant ignorance of 150 years of scientific research on the subject is detrimental to the performance of American students against their international counterparts.

Finally, the U.S. needs to make its curriculums more competitive to keep up with international competition. Students need to be challenged more, but with extra challenge comes the need for more self-confidence. We need to protect students from failing out easily, yet keep them moving at a fast pace to climb up in international rankings. This is much easier said than done, but it can be accomplished by tweaking the system, focusing it on long-term goals and performance instead of one-time-only standardized tests. It may seem like America has a long way to go before it actively competes with its Asian and European superiors, but it can get there with some common sense changes.