

Beyond PISA: How the United States Compares With High-Achieving Nations on Key Educational Issues

NEA Research

Introduction

The achievement scores of American students on international assessments are often used as a reason to favor change in American schools. Yet, in such comparison, little consideration is given to the cultural and demographic factors that define school systems in top-performing nations and in the United States. This review of the research goes beyond the international ‘test factor’ to compare specific aspects of education that are shaped by the norms and values of societies and, to a large extent, form the core of education systems. It is through such comparisons that a clearer picture will emerge on how particular countries with long-standing dominance on intellectual assessments differ from the US and other nations.

The first section of this review is focused on the amount of time students spend in school and the nature of challenges that schools in the US and other countries face in their efforts to meet the required instructional time. The actual face-to-face time teachers spend with students is compared between countries but attention is also given to nuances that make comparisons between countries difficult. Instructional time is further explored through the time lost to student discipline issues in the classroom and time lost to non-instructional issues, such as interruptions from outside the class, fundraising events and other school-wide activities. The degree to which student behaviors, external interruptions and outside activities have opportunities to interfere with instruction reflect whether education is an isolated process or is wholly integrated into the functioning of the society, as in the US.

The other sections of this review are devoted to social issues that directly impact schools—particularly the manner in which schools operate. The public’s opinion of teachers is discussed, and differences across countries are noted which seem to reflect broader issues of trust and responsibility in the society. Also, the diversity of students is explored through indicators which can be measured across countries using common definitions and other comparables. These measures of student diversity include: ethnic diversity, as defined by the enrollment and distribution of immigrant students in school systems; diversity of abilities, as defined by the placement of special needs students in and outside of regular education classrooms; and gender parity as it relates to gender differences in achievement levels, school completion, and the future plans of boys and girls.

Face-to-face time with students

Most students in the US receive as much instructional time as students from high-achieving and economically competitive countries like China and Finland. At every school level, the majority of states in the US require students to receive more hours of instruction than students in most other developed nations.

It is widely believed that students in other industrialized countries outperform students in the US because they spend more time in school than students in the US. Yet, when the data are reviewed more carefully it is found that some countries do, in fact, require students to attend schools for more days per year but the actual amount of instructional hours required by other countries and the US do not differ much at all. Throughout Europe, for example, countries vary widely by the number of days required for school per year—from an average of 185 days with the longest being 200 days in Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands and Liechtenstein—but they also vary widely by the number of hours per week and day students are required to attend school.¹ Even within the US, states establish their own policies for compulsory attendance time and, typically, there is no single measure of school attendance time reported for the US but rather a range across all states—from 180 to 200 days.² Moreover, in the US as well as in most other countries, the amount of time required for school increases with grade level.

To make accurate comparisons between the US and other countries on the amount of instructional time received by students, there are many caveats and different contexts that need to be considered. As such, the most reliable data available focuses on the number of hours required for actual instruction with students. This is considered to be the “face-to-face time” spent with students since it excludes time students spend moving in between classes, their break times and lunch. However, it still overstates the actual amount of time spent on instruction. Available data on instructional time does not account for absenteeism of students and teachers, and does not exclude class time spent on student discipline, non-instructional activities and external interruptions.

On measures of instructional time, the US ranks among the countries requiring the greatest amount of time with students. However, comparisons should be made carefully. In India, for example, schools are open for 220 days per year in grades six through eight³ but this does not mean students in India receive 25% more instructional time than students in the US who spend a minimum of 180 days per year in school.⁴ In fact, students in India actually receive 1,000 hours in instructional time, while students in similar grades in 35 US states are required to receive at least 990 hours of instruction, including Texas which requires 1260 hours. Similarly, middle school students in China are required to attend school more days per year than US students⁵ but, in total, Chinese students attend just under 1,000 hours of school per year which is similar to most US states.

Comparisons between the US and high-achieving countries (e.g., Finland, Korea, Japan and Canada⁶), and with economic competitors (e.g., England, France, Germany and Italy⁷), there are large misconceptions about the amount of actual instruction time required. At the elementary school level, all but five US states require more hours than the average 759 hours of actual instruction required in countries that participate in the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).⁸ Also, at the high school level, the vast majority of US states require more hours of instruction time than the OECD average of 902 hours.

However, for middle schools the comparisons between the US and other countries are stark. The total hours for middle school instruction for the OECD countries range from 777 for Finland—a top performer on international assessments—to 1023 in Italy—an average performer but strong economic competitor. As such, three of the five largest US states rank near the top of all industrialized nations in the number of instructional hours mandated for middle school students—New York requires 990 hours of actual instruction time, Texas requires 1260 hours and Massachusetts requires 990 hours. California and Florida require 900 hours of instructional time which is still above the average of 866 hours for middle schools in OECD countries.

It is clear that students in the US are required to spend as much or more time receiving instruction than students in most other developed countries. However, in the US and in other countries the amount of instruction received varies substantially from the instruction required because of time lost for class disruptions which teachers have little control over. This review continues with a discussion on how pervasive these interruptions appear to be. As the US competes on a global scale, a better gauge on the *quality* of instructional time is as important as the *amount* of required instructional time.

Instructional time lost to discipline issues

Despite perceptions of noise and disorder in our schools, the majority of US students feel their classroom climate is quiet and orderly. American classrooms are more orderly than classrooms in Finland, England and France, and the positive reports from US students have been improving for the past decade. The increase in students reporting order in their classrooms was higher in the US than the average increase of all OECD countries reporting.

Education research throughout the world shows the more discipline problems there are in schools and classrooms, the greater the loss of instructional time and opportunities for student learning.⁹ Moreover, the research confirms that the disciplinary climate in schools is strongly associated with student performance on student assessments.¹⁰ Several international sources of school data confirm the amount of instructional time loss due to student discipline issues is, however, less than widely believed.

The most recent results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that 7 out of 10 (72%) US students report there is “never, hardly or only some” noise or disorder in their classroom.¹¹ The US was slightly above the average of all OECD countries (68.3%). The percentage of orderly classrooms in the US was higher than in Finland (52.1%), France (56.2%), Italy (68.0%) and England (68.4%) but lower than Germany (83.5%), Japan (90.3%), and Korea (77.2%).

The duration of the noise and disorder is relatively less in US classrooms, as well. The vast majority (79%) of students in the US reported their teachers do not have to wait a long time for their class to quiet down (OECD, 2010). In comparison to other countries, the US is above the OECD average of 72.6%, and is 16 points higher than Finland (63.1%). However, the US does fall below Japan (93%) and Korea (88%) who, along with Finland, are also considered to be top performers on international student assessments.

Over the past decade, the amount of instructional time loss in US schools due to discipline issues has declined, and these trends also hold for other OECD countries considered to be academic and economic competitors with the US.¹² On average, the percentage of students in OECD countries reporting their teachers “never” or “hardly ever” had to wait a long time for the class to quiet down increased by six percentage points between 2000 and 2009—from 67% to 73%. The increase in the US was very similar at 6.4%, and no country reporting on this measure showed a worsening of the classroom disciplinary conditions—25 out of 38 countries showed improvements and the remaining 13 showed no change.

Instructional time loss to fundraising and other non-instructional activities

School fundraising activities in the US seem designed to minimize disruptions of class time but the amount of instructional time lost due to administrative interruptions and other outside activities seems to be problematic. Teachers in other developed countries also report a substantial portion of class time is devoted to administrative tasks.

Despite of the instructional time mandated by state and school district policies, there are disruptions to the instructional process which result in lost opportunities for students to learn — whether caused by internal problems with student discipline or by external interruptions and other activities. The loss of instructional time in US schools due to misuse and interruptions throughout the day has captured the attention of education researchers for decades but global studies on classroom disruptions have been largely focused on student behavioral or discipline issues.^{13,14} Therefore, comparisons between the US and other nations on administrative types of interruptions will be mostly anecdotal.

Since public schools serve as a hub for many American communities, school-wide activities that engage students with the community are common-place. However, there have been concerns over the impact of certain structured activities that interfere with the time of students, teachers, and even parents—but in particular, school-wide fundraising. Although most school principals agree that fundraising is a “necessary evil,” they say they would stop immediately if the funds were not a life-line of support to the school. A recent survey of principles by the National Association of Elementary School Principals¹⁵ found that 95% of principals plan on holding at least 1 fundraiser to supplement their budgets, with 20% expecting to hold more than five. In fact, 85% of principals responding to the NEASP survey noted an increased need for fundraising within the past decade.

However, most schools and districts have made special efforts to ensure that fundraising activities do not occur during instructional time. Many school districts have developed written guidelines on the type and number of events, and most have strict language about when the events can occur, which is usually outside of instructional time. The NAESP survey found the top year-long fundraising methods are collecting food box tops and labels (63%); retail store affiliations (42%), and supermarket receipts (24%).¹⁶ For fundraisers that are held once a year, the more common method is product sales (44%), and those held twice a year are usually book fairs (54%). Other fundraising activities include, collecting aluminum cans, and “charging” teachers and students if they want to have special privileges for a day. As noted, all of these activities seem designed to avoid conflict with the instructional time and do not appear to be disruptive.

Recent data on school fundraising in other nations cannot be found, and this issue has not garnered much attention in education research and policy on an international scale. However, beyond fundraising, other activities occurring in schools throughout the day seem to be much more disruptive to instructional time, and these appear to be more global. There are numerous interruptions that typically involve administrative and procedural matters, such as PA announcements, telephone calls, deliveries and messages to the classroom, student call-outs, as well as excessive noise outside the classroom, or infrastructural activities.

Large-scale data cannot be identified on the interference of non-instructional activities in US schools but small studies of classrooms in the US show a barrage of interruptions throughout the day. Observations confirm that a single classroom in a typical urban high school could experience two or more interruptions per class, and average more than five interruptions throughout the day.¹⁷ Even in a suburban high school where active attempts are made to limit class interruptions, there can be numerous interruptions with a typical class period experiencing nearly two interruptions each day. This is similar to reports of other studies showing 3-4 interruptions per day in Louisiana classrooms, where the intercom was found to be the most frequent source of instructional interruption (45%), followed by other student visitors (37.0%), other teacher visitors (32.5%), noise (15%), telephones (14.5%), and parent/outside visitors

(14.0%).¹⁸ These categories were further documented to be the most frequent regardless of whether the schools were urban or suburban.

Recent data compiled on the countries participating in the OECD (excluding the US) show teachers in most countries spend 8-9% of the average lesson time on administrative tasks. Only teachers in Malaysia, Brazil, and Mexico reported spending more than 9% of their time on administrative task (11, 13, 17%, respectively).¹⁹ Although comparative data from the US cannot be presented here, the level of interference seems similar to the level of daily interruptions described for American classroom.

Yet, while administrative and other activities are disruptive to instruction, these pale in comparison to the school disruptions experienced in developing countries. In Gambia, for example, textbooks are often scarce and much class time may be lost by writing out lessons and problems on the board.²⁰ In certain Asian and South American countries instruction may be suspended for extended periods of time due to a lack of money for substitute teachers or because of strikes which delay school openings. Developing countries also experience infrastructure and climate problems which close schools, and many must reduce the amount of instructional time so all students can get some space. Therefore, from a global perspective, it is not so much the type of class interruptions which seem so alarming in US schools and in other developed countries but rather the frequency of the interruptions which appear to be menacing.

Public Esteem for Teachers

Opinion polls on America's teachers and the teaching profession have taken on a variety of issues ranging from teacher effectiveness to the fairness of teacher salaries. However, beyond public opinions, the recognition of teachers as skilled professionals—as reflected in public policies—reveals much about a society's overall value for the teaching profession. Data on these issues have been collected to varying degrees in the US and throughout the world and show the underlying causes of public perceptions are closely tied to national cultures which differ in fundamental ways. For instance, most countries expect students to focus on learning and for schools to spend almost all of their time on academics. In the US, however, schools are asked to take on a range of other responsibilities from driver education to drug-abuse prevention and building community spirit. Academic learning is only one purpose of schooling in the US, and some critics argue it's not always the most important one.²¹ American's esteem for teachers seems to be highly skewed toward our expectations of schools, in general.

Professional Respect of Teachers

Americans hold high opinions of teachers but teachers' satisfaction in their profession has been declining steadily because they feel disrespected in their jobs. Compared to other countries, American sentiment towards teachers is very positive but public policies toward the teaching profession in the US are less rewarding than in other countries and is reflected in teachers' limited input in school decision-making.

For the third year in a row, the PDK/Gallup Poll showed that Americans hold high regards for public school teachers.²² In the most recent poll, 71% of Americans reported they have trust and confidence in the men and women who teach children in the public schools. Also, over 40% of Americans described the teacher who had the most positive influence on their lives with words such as caring, compassionate, motivating, and inspiring. The vast majority (80%) of Americans polled said they knew a public school teacher personally.

However, data from the recent Met Life survey show the number of teachers in the US who feel treated as a professional by the community has declined over the past five years from 83% in 2006 to the overall rate of 77% in 2011.²³ Moreover, the survey shows that teachers who do not feel treated as professionals are much more likely to have low job satisfaction and are more likely to leave the profession.

Around the world the status of teachers is reflected in their level of professional responsibilities and their role in decision-making. Although making decisions at the school level differs substantially across countries, the US reports one of the lowest levels of decision-making at the school level among other OECD countries reporting.²⁴ In the US, 67% of decisions related to the organizing of instruction are made at the school level or after consultation with schools, while in many other countries the percentage is much higher—89% in England and Italy; and 78% in Finland, France, Korea, and Germany.

A four-year study of teachers in England, however, showed mixed results where about half (49% in 2003 and 47% in 2006) of the general public surveyed considered teaching to be an attractive career.²⁵ Although teachers appeared to not be overly concerned with their public status, the study found they did have a more positive sense when they felt trusted, appreciated and rewarded by parents and through collaborative work with other professionals. Yet, while public perceptions of teachers remained the same, the reasons for seeing teaching as an attractive profession changed. The salary of teachers in England became a key reason for changing public perceptions of teaching, and the media representation of teachers during that period also changed to a more sympathetic and positive portrayal of the profession.

In a recent poll of Canadians on a contractual dispute between teachers and the provincial government, the public was evenly divided on whether the teachers union or the district had been fair and reasonable.²⁶ However, when the actions of teachers were polled separately from the union which represented them, teachers were the only party that received more public approval (54%) than disapproval (41%) for their actions in this contract dispute. All other parties had more public disapproval than approval.

Some scholars believe the status of teaching as a profession is rooted in the larger social and cultural values of society and may reflect some elements of sexism toward a profession dominated by women.²⁷ To use Finland as an example, those who study the success of the Finnish society point out that Finland scores high on other international comparisons besides education and is found to be among the most equal countries in how men and women are empowered.²⁸ They argue that while teaching is a well-respected and coveted profession in Finland, their respect for teachers might be explained more so by gender equity in the country. In contrast, teachers in the United States—traditionally and predominantly female—are treated with much less respect. For teachers, "compliance is rewarded; independence and autonomy are not teacher-like."²⁹

In his address at the recent World Teacher Day Summit, Ronald Thorpe, president of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards asked: What makes a profession a profession? Thorpe suggested the reason teaching continues to suffer from a low status in the US is because the profession has not required teachers to meet the standards that even teachers agree make it deserving of a professional status.³⁰ Again, Finland is raised as the example of where a Master's degree in the appropriate area of specialty is required even for beginning teachers. While Thorpe acknowledges this is not the only reason for the low status of teaching, he believes it is one which can only be resolved by those in the profession by creating the conditions under which teachers are the agents of reform, not the targets of it.

Equity in Teacher Salaries

The American public mostly believes teachers are underpaid, and the proportional spending on teacher salaries in the US falls short of the same spending on teacher salaries in the other developed countries—reflecting different spending priorities.

A recent opinion poll found that more than half (55.7%) of Americans feel teachers do not earn enough pay, and just 13 percent consider them overpaid.³¹ Also, nearly 7 out of 10 (69.1%) young adults 18 to 29 years old—more than any other group, even Democrats—believe that teachers are underpaid.

The relative importance of teacher salaries in the US and in other countries is reflected in the data compiled on how countries spend on education. Teacher salaries in US secondary schools make up 55.3% of the total education expenditures which is notably lower than the 62.8% average of OECD countries.³² Other countries that are typically compared to the US all had higher proportions of the education budget spent on teacher salaries: Canada (62.4%), France (59.5%), United Kingdom (57.1%), and Korea (56%). The proportion spent on teacher salaries in Finland (51.7%) was, however, slightly lower than in the US.

A different picture emerges when comparisons are made between the US and other OECD countries on the compensation of 'non-teacher' staff, including school administrators. At 26.1%, the US spends a higher proportion than other developed countries on non-teacher salaries.³³ Most OECD countries range between 12-18%, with a low of 8.6% in Korea.

Student Diversity

Diversity can be defined by differences in physical, social, and economic characteristics but to measure diversity on an international scale it must be through common elements of societies which have similar meanings and values. The diversity of students attending schools in the US and in other countries is explored here through universal characteristics which are defined and operationalized in basic terms. International data are examined across schools, classrooms and achievement levels and discussed to show the distribution of students by ethnicity, ability level, and gender. Where possible, trends in improvements are also noted.

Diversity in Ethnicity and Socio-Economic Status

The US has one of the largest populations of immigrant students enrolled in school and also ranks high among other countries in the percentage of immigrant, poor students who attend disadvantaged schools. However, for non-immigrant students, the US ranks among countries with the smallest proportion of native-born, poor students attending disadvantaged schools.

The presence of immigrants from different cultures and ethnic origins helps define the diversity of nations, communities and schools. The distribution of immigrant students in schools by a range of ethnic, social and economic characteristics reflects the degree of assimilation encouraged by societies and the nature of challenges posed for education systems. For those countries with large immigrant and poor populations, these challenges impact schools in particularly obvious ways.

The US ranks 7th highest among OECD countries in the percentage of immigrant students enrolled.³⁴ At 19.5%, the US is only exceeded by Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Switzerland which have 23-25% immigrant students, and Luxembourg which has 40%. Eleven

countries had fewer than 5% immigrant students, including Poland and Korea which reported none. Others include Czech Republic, Chile, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Luxembourg, Slovak Republic, and Turkey.

Notably, however, the number of immigrant students enrolled in schools is not strongly associated with student achievement scores. Countries with the highest achievement on the PISA exams vary widely in their percentage of immigrant students.³⁵ High-scoring OECD countries such as Canada and New Zealand each have 24% immigrant students but Finland has only 2.6% immigrant students. Also, high-scoring Japan has less than 1% immigrant students, and, as mentioned earlier, Korea reported no immigrant students. Looking even further at the OECD ‘partners’, the high scoring regions of China are comprised of 1-40% immigrant students.

An examination of how immigrant students are integrated into the school system provides evidence of whether diversity is managed through equity. At 79%, the US ranks 3rd highest among other OECD countries in the concentration of poor, immigrant students attending disadvantaged schools—schools with a large percentage of other poor students.³⁶ Countries with higher percentages of poor immigrant students attending disadvantaged schools are the United Kingdom (79.8%) and Belgium (76.5%). Among other countries reporting on immigrant students, Portugal and Ireland have the lowest percentage of immigrants concentrated in disadvantaged schools (12.5% and 26.2%, respectively). The latest scores on the international PISA exams confirm that enrollment in a disadvantaged school is highly correlated with the lower achievement scores of poor, immigrant students, and the relationship is even greater than with the language of instruction at home.³⁷ Some scholars have recently argued that it is the disproportionate number of poor students in US schools that account for the substantially lower scores of American students on international assessments, and when adjusted on socio-economic status, the rankings of US students improve considerably.³⁸

On the other hand, the number of poor, non-immigrant (native-born) students concentrated in disadvantaged schools in the US shows much more promise. At 42.3%, the US ranks 7th lowest (tied with Spain) on having fewer native-born, poor students attending disadvantaged schools.³⁹ Countries ranking lower than the US include Luxembourg, Turkey, Mexico, and Portugal with 27-37%, and the Netherlands and Switzerland with about 40% each. Countries with the overall highest concentration of native, poor students in disadvantaged schools are Slovak Republic, Israel and Czech Republic with 72-83%.

Diversity in Abilities

Comparisons are difficult between countries on the identification and placement of special needs students but surveys confirm declines in the number of students with special needs who are educated in ‘segregated settings.’ Yet, only a handful of countries educate fewer than 5% of special needs students in separate schools similar to the US.

The inclusion of special needs students in regular classroom settings reflects the strongest commitment of a school system to equality for all learning abilities. About 95 percent of students with special needs in the US are enrolled in regular schools, and more than 80 percent spend most of their school day in general classes.⁴⁰ However, striking differences have been reported for other countries in the educational placement of students with special education needs. Some nations serve virtually all of their disabled students in regular schools (e.g., Italy), while others serve nearly two-thirds in segregated schools (e.g., the Netherlands).⁴¹ Despite the increase of students with disabilities in the mainstream of general education, the practice varies widely throughout the world and continues to be debated. Also, caution should be used in making comparisons between countries as accurate data are not always available or directly comparable.

Since students with special educational needs are not identified, assessed or offered provisions in the same way within countries, and there is incomparability in terminology, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education concluded it is not useful to compare special education students who are in inclusive settings.⁴² Therefore, the only comparable set of data between countries defined precisely the same is the percentage of pupils who are ‘*educated in segregated settings*’.⁴³ As such, the number of special education students in segregated school settings in the US is 3 percent,⁴⁴ and is lower than most other OECD countries, including Finland (14.9%) and France (21.2%).⁴⁵ Other OECD countries which have fewer than 5% special needs students in separate schools are Iceland (1.3%), Norway (4.0%); and Sweden (3.7%).

The country showing the most special need students in segregated settings is the Netherlands at 62.1%, which is a decline from previous years. One-half of the 20 OECD countries surveyed between 2008 and 2010 (US was not included) reported declines in the number of special needs students placed in segregated settings.⁴⁶ In the US, however, trends studied over the same time period show a slight increase in the number of students attending separate schools to 3.0% but this comes after 15 years of steady decline.⁴⁷

Diversity in Gender

Gender differences in science achievement are negligible but substantial gaps in reading and math still remain. In the US and other developed nations there are also differences between boys and girls in their secondary program completion and in their plans for future careers—particularly in the technical areas.

Regardless of social, cultural, or personal differences, recent international assessments show that girls and boys are equally capable of succeeding in school. However, the latest PISA

results do show that girls outperformed boys in reading (508 and 475, respectively) in every OECD country, and the average scores differ by 33 points.⁴⁸ The gender gap in the PISA reading proficiency is equivalent to about a year's worth of schooling. In mathematics, however, boys scored 15 points higher than girls (496 and 481, respectively), and there is no real gap in the science performance of boys and girls (498 and 494, respectively). Both science and math show stronger movement toward gender parity than reading. Similar results to PISA are found on other international assessments in reading and science —such as on TIMSS and PIRLS but the gender gap in math is even less than shown on the PISA exam.⁴⁹

In the US, 83% of males complete high school compared to the 88% of females.⁵⁰ Among OECD countries, the US ranks 5th highest in the percentage of males completing secondary school programs (or high school) and ranks 6th in the percentage of females completing secondary programs. Among all OECD countries surveyed, female graduates outnumber male graduates by an average of 8% (66% and 74%, respectively) but the gap between male and female graduates in the US is smaller at 4%. The countries with a smaller gap than the US are Korea and Japan (both at 1%) ; Slovak Republic (2%); Sweden and Finland (both at 4%). Ten countries showed gender gaps of 10% or higher, including Norway (18%) and Belgium (FL) (15%) which have the largest gaps.

In comparing the US to other OECD countries on the career plans of boys and girls, the US has one of the largest gaps between the number of 15 year old boys and girls planning a science-related career, such as engineering and computing.⁵¹ The gap between the US boys and girls on planning science careers is 10%, with boys outnumbering girls. At 11%, the Netherlands is the only other OECD country showing a larger gap than the US. More than a third of OECD countries have gender gaps of 2% or less in planning science careers, with France and Belgium showing a gap of less than 1%. The countries which typically score highest on international exams have a range of gender gaps in planning science careers but all gaps are less than the US: Japan 2%, Finland 3%, Canada 5%, and Korea 9%. Although, boys outnumber girls in all OECD countries on plans for science-related careers, more girls than boys do expect to have a career in health services.

Conclusion

By comparing international statistics in education beyond student achievement scores, certain social and cultural differences emerge which illuminate education systems in unexpected ways. The issues examined in this review are particularly relevant to the debate on education reform in the US because they help focus our attention on those values that push the US far out ahead of other countries, such as in special education services. Yet, we also see where we lag behind, as in closing gender gaps in the aspirations of our youth.

International comparisons also show where we have unique challenges, as in the education of immigrant and poor children, and where the US stands on matters of equity. Also, by comparing the amount of time students in the US and other countries actually receive instruction—particularly after considering the barriers and interruptions to this time—we gain a better understanding of how the amount of instructional time can be overshadowed by the quality of the time. And, finally, by comparing the level of trust and value placed in teachers in the US and other countries, we realize the amount of progress still needed in the US.

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