

NCTI 2008 Innovators Conference

Session Title Where Do U.S. Students Rank in Global Competitiveness?
Names of Presenters Kevin Bushweller, Charles Fadel, Susan Traiman, Mary Ann Wolf
Date Thursday, November 20, 2008

Summary This panel explored both the assessment data on U.S. students' performance as well as the pressures from businesses to have a better trained workforce. The audience engaged the panel in the Q&A session to provide federal and state policy advice.

Kevin Bushweller, Executive Editor, [Education Week's Digital Directions](#) (Moderator)

Kevin introduced the session by briefly talking about news sources spending time and effort covering issues related to global competitiveness. In the news today there is a different feel regarding global competitiveness compared to 5-6 years ago – it used to be abstract, now it resonates at every level. He stated that young children understand more about the importance of developing skills and knowledge to be more competitive in the world. Kevin posed the question 'What can the U.S. do to help *all* young people better compete in the global marketplace?' and pointed out that the children in the middle (average students) are more likely to be forgotten and left behind.

Charles Fadel, Global Lead, Education, [Cisco Systems, Inc.](#)

Charles' presentation focused on the question of competitiveness and how it is something the consumer media is starting to understand. Skills are now required to be globally competitive (beyond just knowledge) and successful in a job. In addition to traditional core knowledge, employers have started looking for potential employees to also have skills such as problem solving, leadership, critical thinking, technology use, etc. from day one – not to be trained on the job. Cisco has supported the [Partnership for the 21st Century](#) work to provide leadership on meeting the changing demands for graduates. Charles expressed optimism that with the media paying attention to these issues, the problem will become shared and therefore, solvable.

Susan Traiman, Director of Education and Workforce Policy, [Business Roundtable](#)

Susan began her presentation with a story about a roundtable session where a group discussed and ranked priority issues for the President-Elect Obama administration. One group pointed out that nothing in the current list of priorities related to education; recommendations were then realigned to 1) fiscal responsibility and 2) creating an educated population. Susan then asked the audience a question, where do U.S. students rank?

She emphasized the importance of understanding the difference between skills students need vs. skills they have. There is a domestic achievement gap – students with skills vs. students without skills (based on race, ethnicity, disability, economic status) and an international achievement gap – U.S. students vs. International students. Susan then



showed graphs depicting student proficiency in math, reading and science. Math - still less than 4 in 10 students are proficient in math. Reading – proficiency remains low. Science – not improving at any grade level. Susan stated that minority students are performing better, catching up to white students. She also stated that despite the gains there are drops in success after high school for minority groups – graduation rates, earning a Bachelor's degree. According to data, U.S. students are entering the workforce less educated. Regarding college graduation, the U.S. has dropped from 2nd place to 15th place and China is starting to take the lead.

Susan said there are two key elements to creating change:

- 1) **Attitudes** – how to convince U.S. students to try harder in school? and
- 2) **Belief system** – do we truly believe that *all* students can achieve? Do we need to change the way we view student potential? Are we able to recruit the right type of talent? Susan then referenced a paper available online for further information: www.asiasociety.org; author Mike Smith from Hewlett Foundation.

Mary Ann Wolf, Executive Director, [State Educational Technology Directors Association](#)

Mary Ann discussed transforming the educational system to prepare students for 21st century workforce – this topic is being talked about in mainstream media, but we need to keep working on it. She then presented the audience with data on dropout rates:

- U.S. dropout rate of high school – 30%
- Average U.S. dropout rate of students with special needs – 51%

Mary Ann referenced the Student Bill of Rights and discussed how a document like this is easy to write, but it is harder in reality to follow through with the rights listed. She then provided three examples from [SEDTA](#) evaluations of states making a difference in high school dropout rates in Texas, North Carolina and Missouri.

She then went on to clarify what these examples show :

- visionary leadership
- involvement of stakedholders (parents, businesses, etc.)
- rigorous curriculum
- access to online learning
- ongoing, sustainable PD for teachers and administrators
- ongoing use of data to individualize instruction

Her message: do more for kids. Make sure they are prepared for the 21st century. All other industries realize that technology is important, but education is dead last. People assume educators realize technology is important, but this isn't a case. We know what works, but it takes systemic approach, and a lot more work.



Discussion

1. *These are in no way scalable – what are the three biggest obstacles to bring these programs to scale and what are three policy recommendations to state school policy boards or governors to change this in states?*

Mary Ann Wolf: Currently there is a piecemeal approach to using technology in schools due to lack of funding. We must understand that all pieces must work together. Obstacles - technology planning piece must be included in policy; funding can be a problem; NCLB has made teachers focus on test taking rather than students learning. Policy recommendations – having a systemic approach to using technology (funding included); professional development for teachers including coaches; base education on 21st century skills.

2. *Please comment on integration of what students are doing outside of formal classrooms (informal learning)?*

Susan Traiman: Children can excel outside of the classroom (video game example of low performing student succeeding on video games but not in school and high performing students not succeeding on video games) and we need to implement different technologies in the classroom to help all students succeed there.

Charles Fadel: There should be greater investment in technology and informal learning techniques.

3. *Global competitive issue – we should be preparing for the 21st century, but data is only on basic skills so are we being misguided by gaps? Have other areas been tested outside of curriculum gaps? In China, students are having a hard time finding jobs; China wanted to delay the labor problem of high school students so they sent everyone to college. Workplace placement rate is only 6% so they are expanding graduate programs to further delay placement problems. U.S. emphasis should focus on uniqueness, not play catch-up with other countries.*

Charles Fadel: The U.S. does have unmatched strength in areas. However you cannot create without a basis to start from, which is why we look first at curriculum and then look beyond that, combining skills with the content area. No matter what we will not outnumber China/India.

4. *How do you affect change? Why must government always affect change? Why can't business leaders get on the bandwagon?*

Susan Traiman: Businesses operate on many different imperatives. The meltdown of the financial system affects the whole economy; if we can get past the current economic crisis there may be an economic imperative to hire a lot of people. A good solution would be a combination of government incentives and economic imperative.

Mary Ann Wolf: In the K-12 sector I see a partnership happening and an understanding of what it takes to affect change.

5. *Regarding the parents of our students, many adults read at basic level. We need to think about ways to integrate learning in the home to change the culture and skills/capabilities*



impacting learning and teaching with children.

Mary Ann Wolf: Schools that are implementing programs, such as Texas, are getting parents involved because of student enthusiasm. These programs sometimes require the technology to be brought home so there is an increase in parent learning with the students. This systemic reform learning approach is increasing the positive view of education in the home.

6. The hands-off perspective of the U.S. in terms of competition on a global scale, our highly politicized environment might affect our fractured nation. What to do for the local level? Some districts are failing and others are succeeding – unless we get rid of the school board system and move to a government run system how do we succeed on a local level?

Mary Ann Wolf: The programs I referenced (state examples) were designed at the state level and funded at the Federal level. This is a great opportunity for the Federal government to be a catalyst for change. Those states would not have succeeded without Federal funding and the effective state design. These models will only succeed with funding. Spreading the word on this success can help improve the system.

Charles Fadel: European systems – some areas do well and others do not so a federally run system does not always produce positive results. Scaling results of positive programs is one way to improve things from a local level.