Insight

Modest Assessment Results Still Result in Poor Performance

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The results for the 2013 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the "Nation's report card," which measures fourth and eighth grade student performance in reading and math have been released. While the results show some progress, roughly two thirds of American fourth and eighth graders still are not performing at or above grade level in these critical subjects. Specifically, just 42 percent of fourth graders and 35 percent of eighth graders scored at or above proficient in math and only 35 percent of fourth graders and 36 percent of eighth graders can read at or above grade level. Yet our nation's top educator, Secretary Arne Duncan, stated upon the report's release that he *"was encouraged by its modest results."* Additionally, Jack Buckley, the Commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics stated, *"Every two years, the gains tend to be small, but over the long run they stack up."*

The miniscule gains were, on average, one or two points on a 500 point scale in math and reading in 4th and 8th grade. More troubling is the fact that the achievement gap between white students and Hispanics and African American students continues to widen. In fact, the only positive outcome from the 2013 NAEP report is that our students on the whole did not lose ground. There were a few states, such as Tennessee, Hawaii and the District of Columbia, that showed promising gains in reading and math but overall, the United States continues to fail two-thirds of its students.

After decades of excessive educational spending, shouldn't we expect American students to be at the top of the academic ladder? Over the last 30 years federal elementary and secondary education spending has increased from $6 billion in 1980 to $39 billion in 2010. That's a whopping 550 percent. And yet these 2013 NAEP results show that increased spending is not the answer to higher academic performance.

Further illustrating the point, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released a report, *The First Eight Years: Giving Kids a Foundation for Lifetime Success*. This report is based on findings from federal data in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten. While overall, the report shows that children in this longitudinal study (from kindergarten in the 1998-99 school year until 2007) are scoring at or above the national average in literacy, math skills, and science, the results for disadvantaged black and Hispanic children in this group are dismal. Only 14 percent of black children and 19 percent of Hispanic children in this group were on track in cognitive development. The NAEP report reflects these statistics in the academic performance of Hispanic and African American students.

These results should alarm policy makers at all levels of government. Business leaders, as well as parents, should be concerned that these academic results will not produce the leaders and workers of tomorrow. When two-thirds of our nation's students cannot read or solve mathematical problems at a proficient level, there should be an outcry all over this country. Sadly, our top educators are not suitably outraged.