

Superintendent News

WARRICK COUNTY SCHOOL CORPORATION
ADMINISTRATION CENTER

This Edition:

American Students
Compared to the World
The Real Story

Statistical Data—Share it all, or not at all.

January 4, 2013

The new year is an exciting time, as many of us make resolutions for 2013 aimed at improving our lives. Some of us will set new goals for the year. Those goals may be personal, or they may be professional. Regardless of which category your goals fall into, I believe setting goals is important, if we are to improve our lives, our jobs, or our professions. Continuous improvement is a common theme for educators. A lofty goal that requires a great deal of energy, commitment, and perseverance. No one will argue, the landscape of public education is going through an accelerated course of change. Some of that change is having positive impacts on our students, schools, and the programs we offer in our schools. Technology continues to add excitement to instruction, and brings the entire world into our classrooms. Teachers are sharing best practices for classroom instruction while using assessments and data to drive that instruction. Differentiated instruction is challenging every student to learn at their highest possible level. Those are all good things that are improving our schools. Yet there are those that would like you to believe otherwise.

Politicians and some business leaders are claiming American students are falling behind students from other countries. They present partial data to back up their claims, and if that's the only information you had, you might wonder, what in the world are our schools doing! How can American students rank 22nd in the world? Allow me to explain. I am a huge golf fan, and as I'm enjoying the 2012 Masters on television, I can't help but notice the Exxon-Mobile commercials, featuring Phil Mickelson, encouraging us to "fix this." The commercial calls for more math, science, and engineering classes in American schools. They also use statistics showing American students rank 22nd in the world. The data is accurate, but before you get all depressed and upset at our schools, please allow me to present ALL of the data, or as the late Paul Harvey would say, "The rest of the story." The statistics Exxon-Mobile and others site, are the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics, and science literacy. PISA also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies, such as problem solving. PISA was first administered in 2000 and is done every third year. The results cited are from the 2009 test, as 2012 PISA results will not be released until December 3, 2013. Now that you have the background, allow me to fill you in on things Exxon-Mobile and some politicians are conveniently leaving out. First, in America every 15 year-old is required to be in school, so they are included in the testing. Not true in every country. It is also true that students in several countries are "tracked" into academic or vocational programs at an early age. Only the highest performing students are allowed to continue in an academic school. This means many countries only test their top students, which greatly skews the testing results. To further illustrate, if you took the 2009 PISA results, and compared them using poverty levels, the results are dramatically different, and the term "fix this" would be lost. When you compare American students with < 10% poverty to other countries with similar poverty rates, the American PISA score was 551, ranking them number 1 in the world. Comparing American students and world students with 10%-24.9% poverty, the American PISA score was 527, again, ranking them number 1 in the world. When comparing American and world students with 25% -49.9% poverty levels, American students scored 502, again, ranking number 1 in the world! Certainly not the doomsday message some would like to spread. Truth is, American students excel on the world stage, as they always have. Our public schools are widely recognized as the best in the world and are unequalled in serving ALL students, not just the best and brightest. We should be proud of providing a world-class education to EVERY child. Every child matters, every child can learn, and that is America's greatest strength. Always has been, and hopefully, always will be.

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