

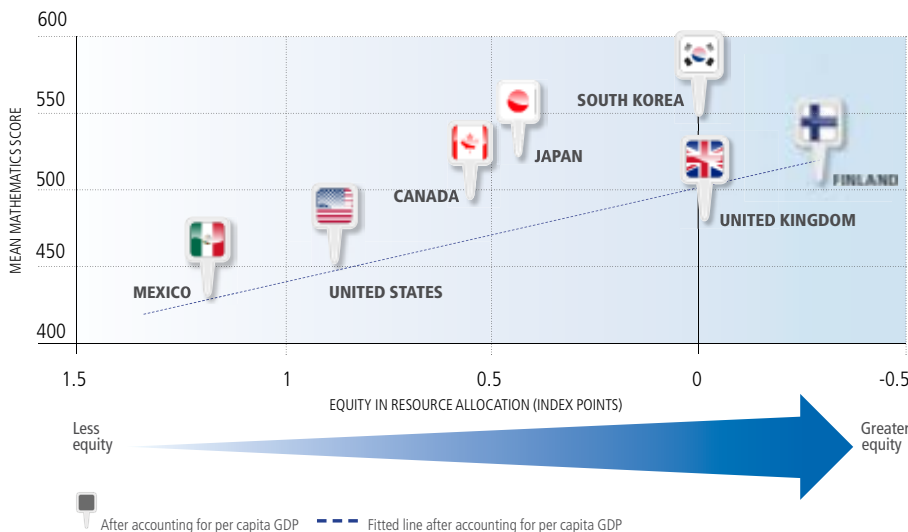
PARSING PISA

When the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released its Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results in December, standings for U.S. students remained relatively unchanged. This test of 15-year-olds in developed nations showed that U.S. students ranked slightly above average in reading, about average in science, and below average in mathematics. The results differed little from prior PISA surveys, prompting questions about whether the most important lessons contained in the PISA comparison are being heeded at home.

PISA leaves no doubt that poverty matters. U.S. schools perform near the top when compared with schools with similar poverty rates in other countries. However, the United States has a much higher child poverty rate than other developed nations. PISA also offers evidence that some of the most common school reforms, such as longer instructional days, a teacher corps drawn from only the top third of college graduates, and union-free school systems, are not found in high-achieving nations.

After the 2009 PISA results, AFT leaders visited high-performing countries and examined OECD recommendations. Today, those recommendations inform two AFT initiatives: the Quality Education Agenda and Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education. “The crucial question we face now is whether we have the political will to move away from failed policies and embrace what works in high-performing countries,” says AFT President Randi Weingarten. For important lessons from PISA, see the AFT’s video “What Does the PISA Report Tell Us about U.S. Education?,” available at www.bit.ly/1eQiOeJ.

Allocation of educational resources and mathematics performance



SOURCE: PISA 2012 RESULTS IN FOCUS, PAGE 28, WWW.OECD.ORG/PISA/KEYFINDINGS/PISA-2012-RESULTS-OVERVIEW.PDF.

DISRUPTING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

In January, the Albert Shanker Institute and the AFT held a public conversation in Washington, D.C., to explore how school discipline policies like “zero tolerance,” often working in tandem with test-driven sanctions against schools, perpetuate a national school-to-prison pipeline that steals educational opportunity from students, particularly children of color. Joining AFT President Randi Weingarten on the panel of speakers were Rep. Keith

Ellison (D-MN) and Yale Law School professor James Forman Jr.

The event took place only hours after the Obama administration issued new guidance on school discipline policies. As a result, much of the discussion at the event focused on the need for the federal government to support the guidelines it had just released, such as hiring more school counselors and providing wraparound services for students and families. A video of the conversation is available at www.bit.ly/LUKXEC.

TEACHER EVALUATION AND SUPPORT

A partnership of the AFT, the New York State United Teachers, and the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals enters its fourth year of helping teams in 12 school districts design and implement teacher development and evaluation systems. Supported by a federal Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) grant, the partnership promotes evaluation systems that ensure teachers receive a career-long continuum of evaluation, feedback, and support. Districts involved have created the Educator Evaluation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Consortium, which has developed an electronic platform to support effective evaluation systems. The AFT has provided funding and guidance for this work, featured at www.bit.ly/1cwp8lN.

THE PROBLEM WITH VAM

Late last year, the District of Columbia Public Schools announced that teachers had received incorrect value-added modeling (VAM) scores in their evaluations. This technical glitch disrupted the lives of dozens of D.C. educators. Although the school district

dismissed the event as minor, AFT President Randi Weingarten said the controversy points to the dangers that arise when decision makers “reduce everything about students, educators, and schools to a nameless, faceless algorithm and test score.” In a recent column in the *Huffington Post*, available at www.huff.to/KOscIQ, and in her “Where We Stand” column on page 1 of this issue of *American Educator*, Weingarten calls out this skewed approach, which undermines school improvement.

TAKING ON “SCHOOL DEFORM”

Diane Ravitch, a one-time believer in market forces to improve public education, visited Capitol Hill in February to lobby against destructive practices that pass as school reform but are, in fact, examples of “school deform.” After meeting with lawmakers, Ravitch addressed an audience at the AFT. At the event, she returned to many of the criticisms in her latest book, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the*

Danger to America’s Public Schools.

The influential education historian pointed to Philadelphia, where administrators are cutting budgets, closing schools, firing teachers, and increasing class sizes while the governor gives corporations big tax cuts. “I think it’s a disgrace when we can afford so much as a society but can’t afford to give the children of Detroit, Philadelphia, St. Louis, or Indianapolis the schools they deserve.” For more on Ravitch’s remarks, visit www.bit.ly/Mcot2w.