

# Roundtable Abroad



- *President Obama and Arne Duncan will not improve “education with what they are doing now,” asserted Pasi Sahlberg, the Finnish ministry official responsible for international education cooperation.*
- *English officials have “data to die for. We know everything.” They know what each child has taken and how well they are doing. They have also privatized half the secondary schools in England in the last decade.*
- *French schools are driven by directives from the center, but Finnish*

*schools rely on “gentle steering based on local trust.” Finnish teacher preparation programs receive 7,000 applicants annually for 900 places in a 5-year training program.*

- *More than 21% of American children live in homes with incomes below the national median, compared to 16% in Britain, 7% in France, and 3% in Finland.*
- *Although the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) describes Shanghai as a system that is both highly effective*

*and equitable, that characterization seems to ignore data indicating Shanghai discriminates against hundreds of thousands of low-income children in the city.*

These were among the most significant insights of an 11-day Roundtable study mission to examine European schools.

This newsletter is devoted to that study mission. It also includes a summary of a Roundtable June meeting that examined cost effectiveness and the changing role of state education agencies.

## EDUCATION IN FINLAND

For all of its beauty in the summer, Finland can be brutal during the winter. The Lapland area of the country is located within the Arctic Circle and long, dark winter days throughout Finland mean that Finns take special pleasure in their summers. A sense of national liberation prevails around the June equinox as schools close for three months and most government agencies operate at half staff for six to eight weeks..

The Finnish education system consists of daycare programs (for babies and toddlers); a one-year "pre-school" (or kindergarten) for six-year olds; a nine-year compulsory basic comprehensive school (starting at age seven and ending at the age of sixteen); and optional secondary general academic and vocational education (which just about everyone takes). After a nine-year basic education in a comprehensive school, students at the age of 16 may choose to continue their secondary education in either an academic track or a vocational track, both of which usually take three years, Petra Packalen, counselor to the education ministry, told the Roundtable.

The Education Index, published as part of the UN's Human Development Index in 2008, lists Finland as tied for first place with Denmark, Australia, and New Zealand. Mean results from PISA also rank Finland at the top of Western nations in achievement, although the same results indicate it produces just 1% of the top 15-year-old science students in the world, a standard by which the United States, producing 25%, leads the world.

### The Big Picture



**Pasi Sahlberg**

"We walked our own way," said Sahlberg. He argued forcefully that while the U.S. embraced competition, standards, choice, and accountability, Finland had chosen cooperation, individualization, equity, and trust in educators. A major part of the Finnish agenda was attacking the out-of-school dimensions of student achievement, especially family poverty.

**Finland never set out to be #1.** Finland has had the same school development plan for 40 years, said Sahlberg. It just gets updated. It has had the same title for 40 years: "Enhancing Equity." To Finns, he said, "a good school is one where everyone learns. If the U.S. assessment system is based on means and grade levels, the Finnish system, which does not include

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"I don't believe American education is nearly as bad as everyone claims," said Pasi Sahlberg, the Finnish education ministry official responsible for international cooperation, at the outset of his remarks. "You can be particularly proud that you have laid out the moral imperative to educate everyone. Most of the innovation in our system originated in the United States." But, he acknowledged, "What I see in the typical American school is a lot of space for sports and very little room for teachers. It's clear no one ever talked to American teachers about what they wanted."

Dismissing PISA league tables as "irrelevant" since they ignored equity, on which the United States performs well, according to Sahlberg, he focused on three big issues.

**Not always high-performing.** Finland has not always been a high-performing system, noted Sahlberg. Forty years ago when Finland set out to improve, it lagged badly with child poverty rates in excess of 20 percent. "You can't educate a hungry or unhealthy child," he said. So Finland pushed for free school meals everywhere and compulsory annual health checks, in a dual strategy promoting equity within schools and equity within society.



## EDUCATION IN FRANCE

Ernest Boyer, U.S. Commissioner of Education until 1980, liked to tell a story about French education to make a point about local control in American schools. “How do you know what your students are studying?” asked an American visitor of the French Minister of Education. The minister consulted his watch: “It is 10:37. At this minute, every 14-year-old in France is opening the Algebra book to page 43,” he declared.

While that degree of control is not the norm today, it is still true that the French education system is far more centralized than that of the United States. The ministry of education defines the educational program, which is carried out by 30 “académies” throughout France, roughly similar to state governments. Every one of the 1.2 million teachers in France is a civil servant, an employee of the government of France.

Education is compulsory in France from the ages of 6 to 16, but a large majority of children start school well before the minimum age, often as young as two years old. Over 50% of 18-21 year olds in France are still in full-time education or following a vocational training course. Some 64% of all school pupils in France complete their secondary education, and take the high-school leaving certificate examinations, known as the baccalauréat or the baccalauréat professionnel.

**Private schools:** About 20% of French students are in private schools -- almost five times the U.S. rate. About 90% of these schools are Catholic; they select their own teachers and offer religious instruction, but follow the same curriculum as state schools if they wish to receive state support and remain under contract to the state education system.

• During an intense 12-hour day that covered visits to two schools, meeting with officials of the Paris Académie and Rectorat at the Sorbonne, and 11 briefings at the French Ministry of Education, the delegation learned:



*Facing camera (r to l) student, principal and teacher at Ecole élémentaire rue de la Mare*

- The French system has been highly centralized since the time of Napoleon.
  - Every teacher is a civil servant and teachers represent at least 60% of all government employees.
  - Académie inspectors worry about schools at the elementary level, but subjects at the secondary level.
  - Inspectors believe their jobs are getting tougher, as social challenges mount in and around cities and adolescent behavior becomes more challenging.
  - Teachers are paid by the national government, capital expenditures by localities.
  - Paris holds 180,000 K-12 students but 350,000 university students -- since the city is France's center of higher education.
  - Teacher preparation in France is a five-year program.
  - Vocational programs do not enjoy the support among policy-makers that they once did.
  - The French have always been so proud of their language and culture that it has proven difficult at times to persuade students to take a foreign language.
  - Ministry officials consider PISA to be significant, but something that provides an image of the past.
  - Still, ministry officials worry about the fact that about 20% of French students are not doing well on PISA's math assessment.
- (continued on page 7)*

## EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

While it has made a great deal of progress, England is still struggling with the educational legacy of centuries of class division, within both society and schools.

Issues of class division persist. In May of this year, two of Britain's leading politicians commented on the continued inequities in England and English education. The British Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, declared the dominance of the public schoolboy in every prominent role in British society to be "morally indefensible." A few days later, Deputy Prime Minister Michael Clegg, observed that an old saying to the effect that "snobbery is the religion of England" continued to have "more than a ring of truth today."

The Roundtable met with Department of Education officials and visited three schools in London to explore these issues. The insights gained were compelling:

- Full-time education has been compulsory for all children aged between 5 and 16 for some time; the school-leaving age was raised to 18 in 2008, to take effect in 2013 for 16-year-olds and 2015 for 17-year-olds.
- The English system displays many of the characteristics of the American reform movement -- assessment, accountability, and the establishment of charter-like schools, variously called academies, trust schools, or free schools.
- The English system emphasizes tests at the age of 7, 11, 14, then a General Certificate examination at age 16, and "A" levels for university admission at age 18.
- The government has "data to die for," according to Sue Hackman, director of the school standards office. "Every child has a unique pupil number; I know for each child what courses they've taken, whether they are making progress, and what is expected. We know everything. There is no hiding place for complacency in our system."
- After "15 years of aggressive management, the new government is aggressive about deregulation," said Hackman. It will emphasize more accountability, a slimmer, more traditional curriculum, and reduction of central administrative costs.
- England is launching an effort to add a year to teacher training programs, reported David Wright. A university degree in England typically takes three years; the emerging proposal is to add an additional year to teacher-training programs, with one term devoted to theory, a second to classroom practice, and a third revisiting theory.
- In the last decade, 50% of all secondary schools in England have become privatized, either academies, trust schools or "free" schools -- i.e., free of government regulation. The Secretary of Education is on public record as favoring free schools run for profit and staffed by teachers without certificates.
- The impetus for deregulation, said Hackman, is that national strategies produce fairly rapid improvement for 10 years, but then flatline. She thought this to be true across the British Commonwealth, not just in England.
- Ongoing issues, according to Hackman, include: challenges of the rural and urban poor, bullying and racism, inattention to vocational education, and the need to integrate the welfare and education agendas.
- Meanwhile, the new government is pursuing policies to require phonics as the basis for reading instruction while equalizing expenditures per low-income student, according to analysts Victoria Woodcock and Nicola Ayton, in a process that will almost certainly take money out of high-poverty urban schools for redistribution it to suburban and rural areas. (*continued on page 7*)



*Students at Harrow in uniforms complete with straw hats*



national assessments, “focuses on whether individual students are meeting their own potential.”

**Finland: high-performing in many ways.** Finland is not a socialist state, emphasized Sahlberg. “It has married the market ideal to the welfare state.” Finland is very competitive globally; it is known for technology, innovation, gender equity, and great integrity in public administration.

Finland, he concluded, “has driven improvement by focusing on the equity agenda. If I could talk to President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, I would tell them that I believe the U.S. will never be successful in improving education with what they are doing now.”

### **Policy, Funding, and Teacher Education**

Sahlberg’s presentation summed up much of what the Roundtable had heard earlier during its visit to Finland from ministry of education officials (Armi Mikkola, Aki Tornberg, Kimmo Hamalainen, and Petra Packalen) and the principal of Saarnilaakso Comprehensive (middle) school. Here are some of the highlights:

- Finnish national policy emphasizes quality, efficiency, equity, and internationalism.
- A basic right to “education and culture” is embedded in the Finnish constitution.
- Because public authorities “must” secure equal opportunities for every resident, “When I moved it never occurred to me to worry about the quality of my children’s new schools,” said Tornberg.
- About 13% of the national budget is devoted to the national Ministry of Education, which funds about 40% of educational costs.
- Tuition at Finnish universities is free and teacher education is one of the highly desirable courses of study.
- Universities select the best of the best for teaching. They typically have 7,000 applicants for 900 places and select students based on grades, examinations, and interviews. Professional development funding has doubled since 2009, reported Hamalainen.
- Trust and respect for teachers explains the popularity of the profession, according to Mikkola. Subject matter teachers are paid better than nurses.
- A five-year training program provides a lifetime certificate that does not need to be renewed.
- All teachers (from kindergarten through university) belong to a single union which is “one of our most important partners” in developing national policy.
- Accountability is based on trust and professionalism, according to Packalen. The national model is one of “gentle steering built on the principle of trust,” she said. The focus is on learning, not testing.
- Inspection, national tests, or ranking of schools based on tests do not exist in Finland.
- Local schools are able to spend funds just about any way they want, with teachers and principals trusted to meet the needs of their students
- Individualization is valued over special education. “We don’t categorize students or put them in boxes,” said Packalen. “We emphasize flexibility and continuous support, all the time, as needed. since every student deserves individual attention.”



*Armi Mikkola*

Both Mikkola and Sahlberg dismissed the idea that a principal and teaching staff from an outstanding Finnish school could turn around an American school. “It’s not possible to move the education system of one





**Michele Quéré, responsible for national testing, briefs Roundtable at French Ministry of Education**

country into the culture of another,” said Mikkola. The idea that schools could be turned around by firing teachers and replacing 50% of the staff mystified the Saarnilaakso principal, Jukka Kuittinen, who literally threw up his hands on hearing of this before responding: “Are you the people doing the firing?”


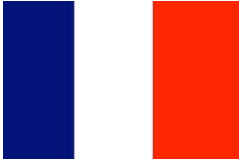




*Bonner Primary students*

## INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AT A GLANCE



*(l to r) Faculty members Jesse Elzinga & Nick Paige welcome Roundtable's James Harvey & Paul Ash to Harrow*

	Finland	France	England	United States
				
Size	130,000 square. miles	260,000 square miles	50,000 square. miles	3,790,000 square miles
Population	5.4 million	65 million	53 million	312 million
Per-Capita GDP	\$36,236	\$35,156	\$35,090	\$48,387



	Finland	France	England	United States
Organization	Centralized goals and funding; decentralized implementation	Centralized goals, funding & implementation	Centralized goals and funding; newly decentralized implementation	Decentralized goals, funding & implementation
Compulsory attendance	9 years	10 years	12 years	10 - 12 years (varies by state)
Children below 50% of median income	3.4%	7.3%	16.2% (Britain)	21.7%
Per pupil expenditures	\$7,558	\$8,511	\$8,681 (UK)	\$11,301
PISA Science Mean	554 (2nd)	498 (25th)	514 (15th)	502 (22nd)
Proportion of world's high-performing PISA students in science	1% (tied for 14th)	5% (6th)	8% (3rd)	25% (1st)



#### ROUNDTABLE FALL MEETING: NEUROSCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Roundtable's regular Fall meeting will convene in San Francisco, October 26-28. The topic: Neuroscience and Technology. The agenda includes presentations on the the cognitive and affective functions of the brain, discussions of the latest educational uses of technology, a presentation from Apple on new developments in technology, and a demonstration of the popular children's television series, "The Adventures of Taxi Dog." For information contact: [kaihiatt@superintendentsforum.org](mailto:kaihiatt@superintendentsforum.org)

- France is cautiously piloting devolution and decentralization approaches, along with efforts to apply performance assessment to public policies (but not personnel).
- French educators are eager to encourage exchange relationships with schools in the United States to promote international cooperation and mobility.

## ENGLAND (CONTINUED)

### A Tale of Two Schools

Visits to two schools dramatically highlighted the different challenges facing schools educating the children of the poor (Bonner Primary) and those of the privileged (The Harrow School).

**Bonner Primary - addressing adversity.** Bonner Primary in Tower Hamlets, London, enrolls the children of refugees and emigrants from Bangladesh (where 50% of the population lives on a dollar a day or less). In Tower Hamlets, these families live 10-12 per two-room apartment in nearby public housing estates. The school is internationally known for its remarkable success with this very challenging student population. “This community,” said headmaster Martin Tune, “has more child poverty than any other area in England.” Fully 90% of the children are Muslim, reported Tune. Bonner Primary has succeeded in raising 50% of its students to Level 5 on national standards by age 11, a standard normally sought by age 14, said Tune.



Bonner Primary is thought of as a “hugely successful” elementary school, one of 20 primary schools in England cited by the government as outstanding and “succeeding against the odds.” The school prides itself on a varied, enriched curriculum and the confidence and achievements of its students. “We want the children who attend Bonner to leave us in Year 6 with the skills and positive thinking needed to achieve their ambitions and to lead happy, successful lives.”

Tune described a powerfully successful multi-year effort that concentrated first on raising literacy levels, turned next to mathematics, and finally broadened the curriculum to include an emphasis on arts for all. Tune stressed that instruction is individualized, that the school supports what each student needs while assiduously avoiding labeling students as special needs, and that it builds community within the school and in the surrounding neighborhood so that parents and community leaders support high expectations for students.

The school is oversubscribed. It had 450 applicants for 60 spots in 2011 and gives priority to special needs children, siblings, neighborhood residents, and then applicants at a distance. Staff turnover is low and last year Tune had 350 applicants for three teaching vacancies. Every teacher teaches only 90% of the time students are in class; 10% of their time is reserved for planning, grading, and evaluation.

**The Harrow School: privilege and high expectations.** Harrow is widely considered to be one of the finest secondary schools in the world. Like its rival Eton, it is an independent boarding school for boys. Founded under a royal charter from Elizabeth I in 1572, Harrow enrolls 800-900 boys, all of whom board full time. Graduates are known as “Old Harrovians.” Basic costs at Harrow run to approximately \$50,000 annually for room, board, and tuition. It enrolls students who are highly privileged and very ambitious, although a bursary (scholarship) program funds the enrollment of exceptional students from distressed backgrounds.

Harrow has a rich history and tradition. The school’s line of famous graduates includes Winston Churchill and six other prime ministers as well as foreign statesmen, Members of Parliament, and several kings and members of various royal families, according to headmaster Jim Hawkins, who greeted the Roundtable. Old Harrovians also include notable figures in the arts and sciences, including George Lord Byron, the Romantic poet and hero who swam the Hellespont and wrote “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” and “Don Juan,” while starring himself in the latter role.

Like educators everywhere in Europe, school leaders were generous with their time and patiently answered questions about the many facets of Harrow that make it unique and successful. Key features that captured our attention included:

- Scrupulous attention to admission and selectivity, which begins two years before enrollment, with students and families required to visit Harrow for examinations and interviews, wherever they live in the world.
- An emphasis on community, the Harrow “family,” and the value of “houses” -- the dorms in which students find their identity, often through athletic and academic competition.
- Housemasters in the 12 houses help students manage the academic stress and their time.
- A rigorous academic program that requires, for example, every student to take a year of Latin and at least one other foreign language.
- Small class sizes to encourage individualization: Classes are normally limited to 15 students. More advanced classes (say, a third year in a language) typically enroll seven or eight students.

Despite obvious differences, common elements link the two schools. Repeating a theme heard at Bonner Primary (and Saarnilaakso), Jesse Elzinga, director of studies, noted that a culture of high expectations, individualized instruction, and a sense of community are central to the Harrow experience.

**Barnfield Studio School: privatizing public education.** The prior Labour government under Tony Blair was interested in “injecting the DNA of business” into public schools, reported Peter Birkett, founder of the Barnfield Federation, which operates and manages the Barnfield Studio School, a secondary school emphasizing entrepreneurial education and vocational preparation for 14 to 18-year-olds. The new coalition government, led by the Conservative Party, is even more enthusiastically on board with a privatization agenda. Over half of all secondary schools in England are now “trust” schools (funded in part by corporate donations) or “academies” (financed by the government through charitable organizations). The new government has added a new category of “free” schools, denoting “free to attend” and “free of regulation.” Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove has blessed concepts of operating these schools for profit, of permitting teachers without credentials to

teach in them, and of selling off school playing fields -- conceivably for 2,000 academies. With the exception of selling some playing fields, these are ideas to date, not policy.

Birkett, an engineer whose career had been built in Australia, was happy to participate in the Blair effort, launching the Barnfield Federation as a sort of holding pen for a variety of schools. He was recognized for his efforts by the new coalition government shortly before the Roundtable arrived in London, being named to the Queen's honors list by Prime Minister David Cameron. Plain Pete Birkett is now Sir Peter Birkett.

In a compelling presentation, Birkett (left) argued that the great thing about federations such as Barnfield is that they "are able to be independent, even though 80% of the income for our schools comes from the government." Barnfield was the first federation to be an academy sponsor, and to establish a free school. It operates 7 campuses, employs a staff of 1,700, and has an annual operating budget of about \$65 million, with "healthy reserves." Birkett believes the Federation is able to drive more dollars to the classroom by restraining administrative costs at the center. The Federation enrolls 26,000 students and plans on 40 academies -- the "sweet spot" in terms of the Federation's finances.

Birkett said Barnfield seeks "traditional values in a modern context." If necessary, it insists on an extra school day each week for its schools. To promote a respectful culture, Barnfield expects students to stand when adults enter the room, prohibits jewelry and cell phones on campus, requires students to stay on campus during lunch, and signs agreements with families outlining what the school expects of students and families -- and what the family can expect of the school. The school is also focused on raising standards and outcomes (it has reduced unemployment among recent graduates from 30% to 2%, according to Birkett) and on creating a shared vision throughout the community. If you pay attention to governance, behavior and attendance, standards, and assessment, said Birkett, "everything else takes care of itself."

Using spreadsheets, Barnfield monitors student performance. A green sign means students are exceeding expectations; amber means they are on target; red indicates they need help. "Then we personalize a program to meet the student's needs." Birkett's main message: "There is nothing wrong with these students. The blaming of students and family has to stop."





## COST EFFECTIVENESS AND COST-BENEFIT ANALYSES IN EDUCATION

**Cost Effectiveness and Cost-Benefit Analysis**

How do you as a superintendent judge which is the best bet for improving reading at the elementary level: investing in a new reading series or a library literacy program? What about a major new investment in preschool or kindergarten programs? Do they have any effect? This is where cost effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses come into the picture, according to Henry Levin of Teachers College, Columbia University at the Roundtable's Summer meeting, June 1-2. Levin, the William Heard Kilpatrick Professor of Economics and Education at Teachers College, is a specialist in the economics of education. He has published fourteen books and almost 300 articles on these and related subjects. Below, he speaks with Jerry Kohn former Harrisburg superintendent, and Steve Price, Hazelwood, Missouri.

Cost effectiveness analysis (CEA) lets analysts compare alternatives by taking both the costs and the effects into account. It is always oriented around educational objectives. Do you want to improve high school graduation rates? Which is more cost effective — preschool reading programs, smaller elementary school classes, or encouraging all student to take Algebra in Grade 8? Cost effectiveness studies get at questions such as these.



Cost-benefit analyses, by contrast, look at not only the costs but the financial returns on educational investments. If cost-effectiveness analysis worries about educational returns, cost-benefit analysis focuses on financial returns.

Perhaps the most influential example of these analyses revolved around the famous Perry Preschool Program, funded in Michigan in the 1960s. The study compared 123

African-American children, with 58 randomly assigned to a preschool program and 65 who did not participate and followed these small children for 40 years.

Two tables and figures lay out the benefits. The first outlines the social benefits of participation vs. non-participation in the preschool program.

**Table 1: Benefits of Perry Preschool Program at Age 40**

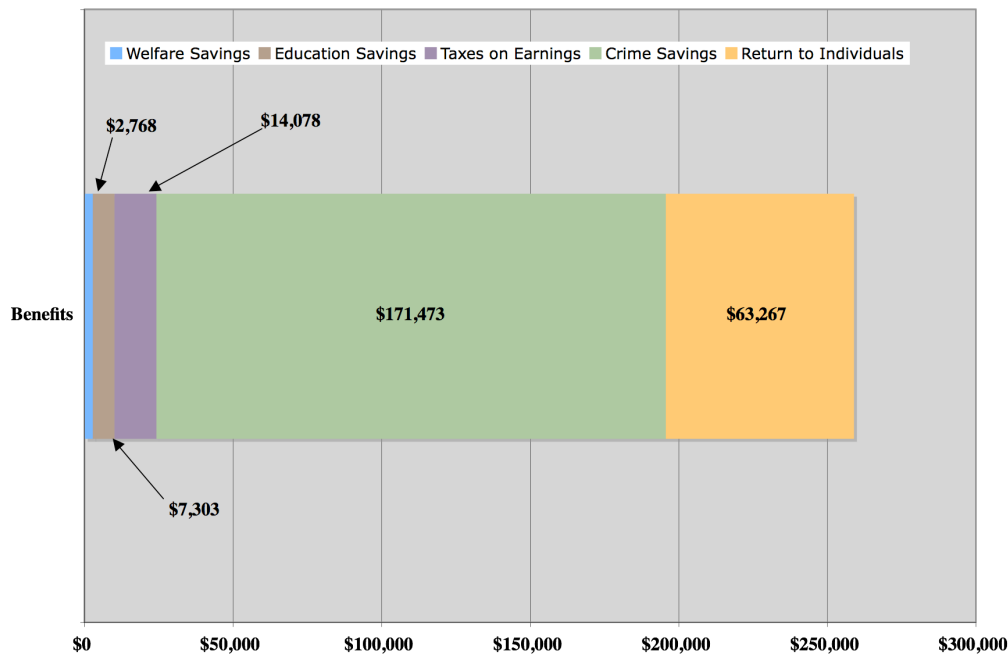
Indicator	Program	No
Completed High School	65%	45%
Employed at Age 40	76%	62%
Median Earnings	\$20,800	\$15,300
Owned Own Home	37%	28%
Owned Own Car	82%	60%
Had Savings Account	76%	50%
Required Social Services	71%	86%
Arrested 5 or More Times	36%	55%
Arrested for Violent Crime	32%	48%
... for Property Crime	36%	58%
...for Drug Crimes	14%	34%
Male raising own children	57%	30%
Getting along with family	75%	64%
Requires sedatives	17%	43%
Uses marijuana	48%	71%
Uses heroin	0%	9%

On every indicator where society would hope participants performed better (e.g., completed high school, employed, or owned a home), participants did better. On every indication of a troubled life (requiring public assistance, arrests, drug usage), participants were noticeably less troubled.

The second figure lays out the economic returns. For every dollar invested in a preschool effort such as the Perry program, society received an economic return of \$17.01 over 40 years. Investing \$15,166 returned \$258,888 to society per participant, in constant dollars. The return is in two parts: *reductions* on expenditures for education, public assistance, and the criminal justice system and

additions to state and local revenues in the form of higher taxes on participants' earnings. (Figure below.)

Public schools are just beginning to get involved with cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses. One of the best examples



was recently reported from Virginia Beach, Virginia, a district with 70,000 students. Tired of a public discussion implying that schools are nothing but a drain on taxpayers' resources, superintendent James Merrill commissioned a cost-benefit analysis from an economist at North Carolina State University, Michael Walden. The economist concluded that for every dollar spent on Virginia Beach schools, the local economy receives back \$1.53.

### Developments in State Education Offices

David Hespe (right), chief of staff to the New Jersey Commissioner of Education, served as Commissioner of Education in the Garden State under former Governor Christine Todd Whitman. "In philosophy, vision, and structure," he told the Roundtable at its summer meeting, "there is no comparison between the Department of Education I entered in 1997 and the one that exists today. They are very different places."

He went on to describe a department that is becoming more focused on school performance and "outcomes," as distinct from the entity he led, which was part of a hierarchy in education that "focused on making sure that everyone did what they were supposed to do." He thought this change was typical of the changes experienced by state education agencies around the country. "In 1997, we thought our job was compliance," noted Hespe. "When it came to school improvement, we told people what to do. If you made a list of low-performing schools in 1997 and compared it to the same list today, there'd be very little change. So, you'd have to say that in terms of our efforts in the state since 1997, the compliance approach has not been very successful."

But, he said, a good symbol of the changes afoot could be found in New Jersey's request for a waiver under *No Child Left Behind*. Today New Jersey, like states everywhere, is focusing on schools, not on districts. It is now moving away from telling districts what to do to an emphasis on doing more alongside the most troubled schools. "We want to bring in expertise. We want to be partners. There are 2,500 schools in New Jersey and we're focused on the 200 that need the most help."



Hespe acknowledged that the department is experiencing difficulty finding the right people to put on its own bus, to use an image from Jim Collins' *Good to Great*. State department employees face a salary cap of \$141,000 and it's hard to find outstanding people willing to go to work for the state at such salaries. Challenged on whether Governor Christie's decision to cap salaries for school superintendents had not been a boon for surrounding states (who are hiring experienced superintendents from New Jersey), he insisted that the situation permitted Garden State districts to hire ambitious young administrators from elsewhere. Is the rancor between educators and the governor that seems so divisive to people outside the state interfering with good government in New Jersey? Hespe thought not, dismissing the issue as a clash between the personal styles of the governor and the head of the state teachers' association.

#### PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT (PISA)

When the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) issues the results of the Program on International Student Assessment (PISA), education ministries around the world fret about the relative performance of their 15-year-olds. While American corporate and political leaders complain that average Americans student scores "rank" Americans 22nd in the world in science, European leaders often worry that America will overrun them in global competition since American schools produce 25% of all high-scoring 15-year-old science students in the world. By that standard, the United States ranks first in the world. Japan, which produces 13% of all the high-achieving science 15-year-olds, is second.

While in Paris, the Roundtable had the benefit of a detailed briefing on PISA from Michael Davidson (right) of the early childhood and schools division of the OECD education directorate. The assessment involves more than 500,000 students, representing 28 million 15-year-olds in 74 nations. It covers reading, mathematics, and science. In reading and math, the U.S. is around the OECD average; in science, the U.S. is above the OECD average. Results for the northeastern United States are noticeably higher than those for the South. OECD hopes to field test and market a new state version of the test for individual American states.

Davidson described the United States as barely being in the quadrant with high average performance and large socioeconomic disparities. Shanghai, on the other hand, exemplifies the quadrant with high average performance and high levels of social equity. That statement was questioned by Roundtable participants, many of whom have been to China up to four times. The skepticism was rooted in several factors: Many 15-year-olds in China are not in school. Only about half of Chinese middle school graduates enroll in high school. Shanghai is a particularly privileged Chinese enclave with a history of discriminating against rural migrants (all Chinese nationals) who come to the city seeking work. Davidson acknowledged, "If they are not in school, they are not assessed."

Subsequently, the Roundtable forwarded research to OECD indicating that although 25% of Shanghai's population is made up of migrants, that population represents only 20% of Shanghai students in Grade 1, with the proportion declining step-wise and regularly until by Grades 8 and 9 (when the PISA examinations would be administered), less than 4% of Shanghai enrollments are made up of low-income migrant students. As this newsletter went to press, only a partial response from OECD had been received.

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