



ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

OECD Washington Center

US Department of Education

Talking Points by Deputy Secretary Ray Simon

OECD Press Conference for the US Launch of *Education at a Glance – OECD Indicators 2005*,
Washington, DC, September 13, 2005

1. The OECD Education Directorate, under the leadership of my colleague, Dr. Barry McGaw, has done another outstanding job in 2005 in compiling the comparative statistics for Education at a Glance. The US Department of Education is pleased to have had the opportunity to contribute to this compilation.
2. The theme for this year's release—how education contributes to the knowledge economy—is one that resonates with us. President Bush and Secretary Spellings have stressed the critical role that education plays in making our nation and our citizens economically competitive. A major thrust of the educational reforms embodied in our No Child Left Behind legislation and related initiatives is precisely to ensure that our schools, standards, and access to quality education for all keep us competitive in a changing world.
3. We have seen evidence in the recent Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other studies [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and our own National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)] that we are beginning to make real improvements as well as identify where we need more work. Our data show that this is mainly in the primary and middle school years. And we know that our next focus must be high school, so that those gains do not get lost.
4. The High School Initiative announced by President Bush for his second term is intended to extend the NCLB reform effort to the upper school years. Evidence strongly suggests that this level of education is critical to future economic success, as *Education at a Glance* indicates. And what happens in high school not only affects job prospects, but also higher education.
5. I would suggest that the United States has a stronger education system than these [EAG] averages suggest. Sample averages for a system as diverse, decentralized, and large as ours do not always reveal as much as they do for smaller populations. Many of our schools, students, and teachers can stand comparison with those anywhere else. Our challenge is to spread this excellence more broadly and deeply, by increasing access to high-quality schools, improving curricula, and holding everybody to high standards.

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