

We Did What the Experts Told Us – Education

Education is the key to the success of any country. These are not my words, but rather a paraphrase of nearly every leader in the Western World. We must spend more on education, graduate more students from colleges and universities, lower the pupil/teacher ratio, and commit ourselves to giving everyone a quality education.

When we do this, they promise, our country will prosper, better jobs with higher wages will be created, crime will diminish, economic disparity will decrease, bigotry will fade, and love and understanding will flourish. Tolerance, cooperation, integration, empathy, sympathy, equality, community unity, family cohesion, and personal achievement all thrive in an educated society.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is a part of the U.S. Department of Education, and collects education statistics for the country.

According to the NCES, the American high school graduation rate in 1940 was 24.5%. In 1970, it increased to 55.2%. By 2012, the graduation rate reached 87.6%.

The percentage of college graduates that attained a “Bachelor’s or higher degree” was only 4.6% in 1940. That number rose to 11.0% in 1970, and climbed to 30.9% in 2012.

Another site, usgovernmentspending.com, details government spending each year, based on the U.S. Government Printing Office and the U.S. Census, both offices of the Federal Government. The numbers reveal that total spending on education (Federal, State, and Local Governments combined) has risen consistently over the decades. In 1940, total government spending on education amounted to \$2.8 billion. In 1970, that number rose to \$56 billion, and by 2012, the amount reached \$935 billion.

Another education marker cited by nearly every politician is the pupil/teacher ratio, which is always too high. Despite the claims, the pupil/teacher ratio in public schools has improved over time. According to the NCES, “For public schools, the pupil/teacher ratio fell from 26.9 pupils per teacher in 1955 to 17.9 in 1985, and then further declined to 15.3 in 2008.” The ratio did nudge up during the Great Recession, but in general, the trend is on a declining path.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (the OECD) ranks countries by spending per pupil. Currently, it places the

United States second behind only Switzerland among the member countries in spending per pupil. Despite that high standing, we are nowhere near the top among the world rankings of our students.

I believe all of the numbers above confirm the country's commitment to educating its people.

Our leaders and experts have called for a greater commitment to education for decades. In every imaginable way, we acquiesced to their demands. But were their promises associated with an educated society fulfilled?

The generation that graduated in 1940 not only survived the depression, but also won World War II. They achieved that with a high school graduation rate of less than 25%, and college graduates making up less than 5% of the population.

Today, we have plenty of college graduates, but not enough quality jobs to employ them. We still invent and create things, but manufacture them nearly anywhere but here.

America continues to be an economic giant, but most experts believe American wages peaked in either the late 1960s or early 1970s.

I am certainly in favor of an educated society. However, it does not prevent employers from moving productions overseas. It may build personal self-esteem, but does not appear to instill a sense of obligation to fellow citizens.

As for the predicted link between education and tolerance and enlightenment? Personally, I do not see any such link. Some of the most intolerant citizens in our society have advanced degrees, and many work in academia.

In addition, an educated society is not necessarily an honest or decent society. People may know more today, but they appear to care about others less. They acquire knowledge, but I see little evidence of wisdom. Graduates too often use advanced degrees to forge their own personal fortunes, with little consequence for our country. Finally, does anyone believe that citizens today have better character or possess more personal maturity than the generation that sacrificed so much during World War 2?

Our leaders seem oblivious to any of this, and continue to call for even more money to educate the people, still claiming that education solves all problems. Perhaps it is time for us to educate our leaders.

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