

AASB: public schools work

In recent years, our public schools have come under heavy attack. Unfortunately, many of these attacks rest on misinformation and myth. Following are some common myths and the facts that counter them, and reveal the reality-public schools work.

Myth: National test scores are down, and United States schools lag behind other nations in educating their children.

Fact: A 1996 international comparison of reading achievement showed that nine-year-old students from the United States clearly outperformed students from all nations, except two. Scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), a nationwide exam sponsored by the U.S. DOE, indicates that math and reading performance scores have improved since 1970 for 13- and 17- year-olds. Science proficiency scores have increased since 1977. NAEP scores have increased for minority students-showing that the gap between white students and non-white students is narrowing. Research suggests that this narrowing is because of increased

funding for federal social programs that target at-risk students. SAT scores have remained relatively flat over time, even though the population of students taking the exam has shifted dramatically over time.

Myth: Public education is being "dumbed down" and is not teaching the basics."

Fact: Public school students today are taking more challenging courses in high school. The number of high school students taking math and science classes has risen dramatically since 1982. Additionally, the number of students taking college preparatory courses has also increased, particularly for minority students. Since 1978, the number of students taking at least one advanced placement test has increased by 225 percent.

Myth: Our public schools are not graduating kids.

Fact: High school completion rates have risen steadily, and school drop out rates have declined over the past several decades. Dropout rates for blacks have, in particular, declined substantially since the late 1960's.

Myth: School funding increases make bigger bureaucracies, not better education.

Fact: While per-pupil spending has increased during the past several decades, it has led to concomitant increases in student achievement. The increases in funding for public education have gone primarily toward teacher salaries and special education costs-not to support an expanded school bureaucracy.