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U.S. NEWS

Report Finds U.S. Schools Rank Below Average in Innovation

International Study Tracks Countries' Efforts to Improve Education With New Methods, Tools

By CAROLINE PORTER

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The U.S. ranks below average when it comes to innovation in primary and secondary schools, while countries such as Denmark, Indonesia and South Korea top the charts, according to an international report released on Thursday.

The report, a first for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, outlines new practices in classrooms and schools—both public and private—as well as teachers' methods and tools. It then tracks countries' efforts to improve education through these methods with international data sets already in existence.

Researchers found that innovation led to improved math scores for eighth-graders, a narrowing of the achievement gap and happier teachers.

"In many other areas of the economy, we take innovation very seriously," said Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin, the co-author of the report and a senior analyst in the education department of the OECD. "This is something we should monitor in education."

The overall index for innovation between 2000 and 2011 had an average of 22 points. The U.S. received 17 points, alongside New Zealand, while Denmark earned 37 points.

The U.S. Department of Education houses the Office of Innovation and Improvement, which Mr. Vincent-Lancrin pointed to as an example of the country's efforts to infuse its system with new ideas.

"The highest-ranked countries change many different things at the same time," said Mr. Vincent-Lancrin, who described the U.S. as having a "modest level" of innovation. He said the U.S. had noteworthy changes in performance assessments and the ways schools relate to parents in recent years.

While the U.S. education system grapples with shaky Internet quality in some places and uneven reform policies across states, some caution from drawing wide conclusions about the U.S. in particular.

"The U.S. is a very large country with a lot of geographic, economic and cultural diversity, so that when you generalize about a country like the U.S., it's tricky," said Paul M.A. Baker, who researches innovation policy at the Center for Advanced Communications Policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. "It's like trying to take the average of a 2-year-old male with an 80-year-old female."

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