

## Conversation

### Focus on the American High School

Each of the following texts presents a viewpoint on the American high school.

#### Sources

1. Horace Mann, *From Report of the Massachusetts Board of Education*
2. Leon Botstein, *Let Teenagers Try Adulthood*
3. Todd Gitlin, *The Liberal Arts in an Age of Info-Glut*
4. David S. Broder, *A Model for High Schools*
5. Floyd Norris, *U.S. Students Fare Badly in International Survey of Math Skills*
6. Norman Rockwell, *The Spirit of Education* (painting)

After you have read, studied, and synthesized these pieces, enter the conversation with one of the suggested topics on pp. 163–164.

#### 1. *From Report of the Massachusetts Board of Education*

HORACE MANN

The following selection is taken from an official policy document by Horace Mann (1796–1859), who is known as the father of American public education.

#### Intellectual Education as a Means of Removing Poverty, and Securing Abundance

... According to the European theory, men are divided into classes, — some to toil and earn, others to seize and enjoy. According to the Massachusetts theory, all are to have an equal chance for earning, and equal security in the enjoyment of what they earn. The latter tends to equality of condition; the former, to the grossest inequalities. . . .

But is it not true that Massachusetts, in some respects, instead of adhering more and more closely to her own theory, is becoming emulous of the baneful examples of Europe? The distance between the two extremes of society is lengthening, instead of being abridged. With every generation, fortunes increase on the one hand, and some new privation is added to poverty on the other. We are verging towards those extremes of opulence and of penury, each of which unhumanizes the human mind. A perpetual struggle for the bare necessities of life, without the ability to obtain them, makes men wolfish. Avarice, on the other hand, sees, in

all the victims of misery around it, not objects for pity and succor, but only crude materials to be worked up into more money.

I suppose it to be the universal sentiment of all those who mingle any ingredient of benevolence with their notions on political economy, that vast and overshadowing private fortunes are among the greatest dangers to which the happiness of the people in a republic can be subjected. Such fortunes would create a feudalism of a new kind, but one more oppressive and unrelenting than that of the middle ages. The feudal lords in England and on the Continent never held their retainers in a more abject condition of servitude than the great majority of foreign manufacturers and capitalists hold their operatives and laborers at the present day. The means employed are different; but the similarity in results is striking. What force did then, money does now. The villein<sup>1</sup> of the middle ages had no spot of earth on which he could live, unless one were granted to him by his lord. The operative or laborer of the present day has no employment, and therefore no bread, unless the capitalist will accept his services. The vassal had no shelter but such as his master provided for him. Not one in five thousand of English operatives or farm-laborers is able to build or own even a hovel; and therefore they must accept such shelter as capital offers them. The baron prescribed his own terms to his retainers: those terms were peremptory, and the serf must submit or perish. The British manufacturer or farmer prescribes the rate of wages he will give to his work-people; he reduces these wages under whatever pretext he pleases; and they, too, have no alternative but submission or starvation. In some respects, indeed, the condition of the modern dependent is more forlorn than that of the corresponding serf class in former times. Some attributes of the patriarchal relation did spring up between the lord and his lieges to soften the harsh relations subsisting between them. Hence came some oversight of the condition of children, some relief in sickness, some protection and support in the decrepitude of age. But only in instances comparatively few have kindly offices smoothed the rugged relation between British capital and British labor. The children of the work-people are abandoned to their fate; and notwithstanding the privations they suffer, and the dangers they threaten, no power in the realm has yet been able to secure them an education; and when the adult laborer is prostrated by sickness, or eventually worn out by toil and age, the poorhouse, which has all along been his destination, becomes his destiny. . . .

Now, surely nothing but universal education can counterwork this tendency to the domination of capital and servility of labor. If one class possesses all the wealth and the education, while the residue of society is ignorant and poor, it matters not by what name the relation between them may be called: the latter, in fact and in truth, will be the servile dependants and subjects of the former. But, if

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<sup>1</sup>In a feudal society, a serf who has the right to own property.

education be equably diffused, it will draw property after it by the strongest of all attractions, for such a thing never did happen, and never can happen, as that an intelligent and practical body of men should be permanently poor. Property and labor in different classes are essentially antagonistic; but property and labor in the same class are essentially fraternal. The people of Massachusetts have, in some degree, appreciated the truth, that the unexampled prosperity of the State — its comfort, its competence, its general intelligence and virtue — is attributable to the education, more or less perfect, which all its people have received: but are they sensible of a fact equally important; namely, that it is to this same education that two-thirds of the people are indebted for not being today the vassals of as severe a tyranny, in the form of capital, as the lower classes of Europe are bound to in the form of brute force?

Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, — the balance-wheel of the social machinery. I do not here mean that it so elevates the moral nature as to make men disdain and abhor the oppression of their fellow-men. This idea pertains to another of its attributes. But I mean that it gives each man the independence and the means by which he can resist the selfishness of other men. It does better than to disarm the poor of their hostility towards the rich: it prevents being poor. Agrarianism is the revenge of poverty against wealth. The wanton destruction of the property of others — the burning of hay-ricks and corn-ricks, the demolition of machinery because it supersedes hand-labor, the sprinkling of vitriol on rich dresses — is only agrarianism run mad. Education prevents both the revenge and the madness. On the other hand, a fellow-feeling for one's class or caste is the common instinct of hearts not wholly sunk in selfish regards for person or for family. The spread of education, by enlarging the cultivated class or caste, will open a wider area over which the social feelings will expand; and, if this education should be universal and complete, it would do more than all things else to obliterate factitious distinctions in society. . . .

For the creation of wealth, then, — for the existence of a wealthy people and a wealthy nation, — intelligence is the grand condition. The number of improvers will increase as the intellectual constituency, if I may call it, increases. In former times, and in most parts of the world even at the present day, not one man in a million has ever had such a development of mind as made it possible for him to become a contributor to art or science. Let this development precede, and contributions, numberless, and of inestimable value, will be sure to follow. That political economy, therefore, which busies itself about capital and labor, supply and demand, interest and rents, favorable and unfavorable balances of trade, but leaves out of account the element of a widespread mental development, is nought but stupendous folly. The greatest of all the arts in political economy is to change a consumer into a producer; and the next greatest is to increase the producer's producing power, — an end to be directly attained by increasing his intelligence. For mere delving, an ignorant man is but little better than a swine, whom he so much resembles in his appetites, and surpasses in his powers of mischief.

### Questions

1. Why does Horace Mann begin with a description of the "feudal lords in England and on the Continent" (para. 3)?
2. What does Mann mean by "Property and labor in different classes are essentially antagonistic; but property and labor in the same class are essentially fraternal" (para. 4)?
3. What metaphor does Mann use to describe education in a democracy? Is it effective?
4. When Mann uses the term *intelligence*, does he mean innate ability or developed skill?
5. Describe Mann's style in this excerpt. In what ways is it appropriate for his audience?

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## 2. *Let Teenagers Try Adulthood*

LEON BOTSTEIN

The following opinion piece was written by Leon Botstein, president of Bard College and author of *Jefferson's Children: Education and the Promise of American Culture* (1997).

The national outpouring after the Littleton [Columbine High School in Colorado,] shootings has forced us to confront something we have suspected for a long time: the American high school is obsolete and should be abolished. In the . . . month [after the shootings] high school students present and past [came] forward with stories about cliques and the artificial intensity of a world defined by insiders and outsiders, in which the insiders hold sway because of superficial definitions of good looks and attractiveness, popularity and sports prowess.

The team sports of high school dominate more than student culture. A community's loyalty to the high school system is often based on the extent to which varsity teams succeed. High school administrators and faculty members are often former coaches, and the coaches themselves are placed in a separate, untouchable category. The result is that the culture of the inside elite is not contested by the adults in the school. Individuality and dissent are discouraged.

But the rules of high school turn out not to be the rules of life. Often the high school outsider becomes the more successful and admired adult. The definitions of masculinity and femininity go through sufficient transformation to make the game of popularity in high school an embarrassment. No other group of adults young or old is confined to an age-segregated environment, much like a gang in which individuals of the same age group define each other's world. In no workplace, not even in colleges or universities, is there such a narrow segmentation by chronology.

Given the poor quality of recruitment and training for high school teachers, it is no wonder that the curriculum and the enterprise of learning hold so little sway over young people. When puberty meets education and learning in modern

America, the victory of puberty masquerading as popular culture and the tyranny of peer groups based on ludicrous values meet little resistance.

By the time those who graduate from high school go on to college and realize what really is at stake in becoming an adult, too many opportunities have been lost and too much time has been wasted. Most thoughtful young people suffer the high school environment in silence and in their junior and senior years mark time waiting for college to begin. The Littleton killers, above and beyond the psychological demons that drove them to violence, felt trapped in the artificiality of the high school world and believed it to be real. They engineered their moment of undivided attention and importance in the absence of any confidence that life after high school could have a different meaning.

Adults should face the fact that they don't like adolescents and that they have used high school to isolate the pubescent and hormonally active adolescent away from both the picture-book idealized innocence of childhood and the more accountable world of adulthood. But the primary reason high school doesn't work anymore, if it ever did, is that young people mature substantially earlier in the late 20th century than they did when the high school was invented. For example, the age of first menstruation has dropped at least two years since the beginning of this century, and not surprisingly, the onset of sexual activity has dropped in proportion. An institution intended for children in transition now holds young adults back well beyond the developmental point for which high school was originally designed.

Furthermore, whatever constraints to the presumption of adulthood among young people may have existed decades ago have now fallen away. Information and images, as well as the real and virtual freedom of movement we associate with adulthood, are now accessible to every 15- and 16-year-old.

Secondary education must be rethought. Elementary school should begin at age 4 or 5 and end with the sixth grade. We should entirely abandon the concept of the middle school and junior high school. Beginning with the seventh grade, there should be four years of secondary education that we may call high school. Young people should graduate at 16 rather than 18.

They could then enter the real world, the world of work or national service, in which they would take a place of responsibility alongside older adults in mixed company. They could stay at home and attend junior college, or they could go away to college. For all the faults of college, at least the adults who dominate the world of colleges, the faculty, were selected precisely because they were exceptional and different, not because they were popular. Despite the often cavalier attitude toward teaching in college, at least physicists know their physics, mathematicians know and love their mathematics, and music is taught by musicians, not by graduates of education schools, where the disciplines are subordinated to the study of classroom management.

For those 16-year-olds who do not want to do any of the above, we might construct new kinds of institutions, each dedicated to one activity, from science

to dance, to which adolescents could devote their energies while working together with professionals in those fields.

At 16, young Americans are prepared to be taken seriously and to develop the motivations and interests that will serve them well in adult life. They need to enter a world where they are not in a lunchroom with only their peers, estranged from other age groups and cut off from the game of life as it is really played. There is nothing utopian about this idea; it is immensely practical and efficient, and its implementation is long overdue. We need to face biological and cultural facts and not prolong the life of a flawed institution that is out of date.

### Questions

1. In the first paragraph, Leon Botstein states, "[T]he American high school is obsolete and should be abolished." Why? What specific reasons does he provide?
2. What does Botstein mean by "the rules of high school turn out not to be the rules of life" (para. 3)?
3. What is Botstein's proposed solution?
4. Where does Botstein address a counterargument? Does he refute (or concede) in sufficient detail to be persuasive?
5. Which parts of Botstein's reasoning do you find the strongest? the weakest? Explain.

### 3. *The Liberal Arts in an Age of Info-Glut*

TODD GITLIN

In the following selection, author and university professor Todd Gitlin argues that studying the liberal arts is even more important now in this age of mass media.

The glut of images is, in many respects, unprecedented, and so is the challenge it poses for education and the arts. On average, Americans watch television, or are in its presence, for more than four hours a day — half the waking hours that are not taken up with work (and sometimes even then). For the sake of argument, let us suppose that, during those hours of watching television, the representative American tunes in to six fictional programs. Those might include half-hour comedies, hour-long dramas, and two-hour movies. (Actually, thanks to remote-control devices, many viewers see more than one program at a time. More than two-thirds of cable subscribers surf channels, and the younger they are, the more they surf.)

For simplicity's sake, assume 16 minutes of commercials per hour on commercial channels — say, 40 distinct commercials per hour. That gives us roughly

160 more short units of mass-mediated message per day. For viewers who watch news shows, throw in, as a conservative estimate, 30 separate news items every day. Add trailers for upcoming shows and trivia quizzes. Add sporting events. Add videocassettes. Add billboards along the highway, on street corners, on buses. Add newspaper and magazine stories and advertisements, video and computer games, books — especially lightweight fiction. Add the photo-studded displays of wiggling, potentially meaningful units of information and disinformation that flood into millions of households and offices through the Internet. Read me! Notice me! Click on me! All told, we are exposed to thousands of mass-produced stories a month, not counting thousands more freestanding images and labels that flash into the corners of our consciousness.

Note, too, that this imagescape has a sound track — the vast quantities of performed music and other auditory stimuli, including songs, sound effects, tapes, compact disks, voice-mail filler — all the currents and ejaculations of organized sound that have become the background of our lives.

Now, it is true that no one but impressionable psychotics could be held in thrall for long by most of the minuscule dramas and depictions we find in popular culture. We experience most of the messages minimally, as sensations of the moment. But some part of the imagescape is nearly always clamoring for attention. Caught in the cross hairs of what the comedy writer Larry Gelbart has called “weapons of mass distraction,” how shall we know, deeply, who we are? How shall we find still points in a turning world? How shall we learn to govern ourselves?

What does it mean, this information for which we are to be grateful and upgrade our facilities? When a neo-Nazi creates a World-Wide Web site that maintains that Auschwitz was not a death camp, he is, technically, adding as much “information” to the gross informational product as when someone posts an analysis of global warming. Garbage in, garbage sloshing around. When people “chat” about the weather in Phoenix or Paris, they are circulating information, but this does not mean they are either deepening their sensibilities or improving their democratic capacity to govern themselves. Long before Hollywood or computers, the French observer Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of America: “What is generally sought in the productions of mind is easy pleasure and information without labor.” Toward that very end, the genius of our consumer-oriented marketplace has been to produce the Walkman, the remote-control device, and the computer mouse.

When information piles up higgledy-piggledy — when information becomes the noise of our culture — the need to teach the lessons of the liberal arts is urgent. Students need “chaff detectors.” They need some orientation to philosophy, history, language, literature, music, and arts that have lasted more than 15 minutes. In a high-velocity culture, the liberal arts have to say, “Take your time.” They have to tell students, “Trends are fine, but you need to learn about what endures.”

Faculty members in the liberal arts need to say: "We don't want to add to your information glut, we want to offer some ground from which to perceive the rest of what you will see. Amid the weightless fluff of a culture of obsolescence, here is Jane Austen on psychological complication, Balzac on the pecuniary squeeze. Here is Dostoyevsky wrestling with God, Melville with nothingness, Douglass with slavery. Here is Rembrandt's religious inwardness, Mozart's exuberance, Beethoven's longing. In a culture of chaff, here is wheat."

The point is not simply to help us find our deepest individual beings. It is also to help new generations discover that they are not that different from the common run of humanity. Common concerns about life and death, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness persist throughout the vicissitudes of individual life, throughout our American restlessness, global instabilities, the multiple livelihoods that we must shape in an age of retraining, downsizing, and resizing. We badly need continuities to counteract vertigo as we shift identities, careen through careers and cultural changes.

Finally, we need to cultivate the liberal arts in a democratic spirit — not necessarily for the sake of piety before the past (though that spirit is hardly ruled out), but to pry us out of parochialism. In preparation for citizenship, the liberal arts tell us that human beings have faced troubles before; they tell us how people have managed, well and badly. Access to a common, full-blooded humanities curriculum will help our students cross social boundaries in their imaginations. Studying a common core of learning will help orient them to common tasks as citizens; it will challenge or bolster — make them think through — their views and, in any case, help them understand why not everyone in the world (or in their classroom) agrees with them.

Regardless of one's views of the curricular conflicts of our time, surely no one who is intellectually serious can help but notice how students of all stripes arrive at college with shallow and scattered educations, ill-prepared to learn. They are greeted by budget pressures and shortsighted overseers. A strong liberal-arts curriculum could teach them about their history, their social condition, themselves. Today's common curriculum would not be that of 1950 — anymore than 1950's was that of 1900. What overlap it would have with the past would generate cultural ballast. Surely the academic left and right (and center) might find some common ground in the quest to offer a higher education that is democratically useful, citizenly, and smart.

### Questions

1. Why does Todd Gitlin explain in detail the television-watching habits of most Americans? How does this information lay the foundation for his argument?
2. How does the style of paragraph 2, which begins "For simplicity's sake," reflect its content? Pay special attention to the sentence structure.

3. What effect does Gitlin's use of such emotional terms and references as "impressionable psychotics" and "neo-Nazi" have on his audience?
4. Why does he quote nineteenth-century critic Alexis de Tocqueville (para. 5)?
5. Gitlin offers several reasons for the importance of the liberal arts. What are they? Why does he present them in the order that he does?
6. This selection is from a longer article about the need for a common core curriculum in colleges. Do you think that its argument is relevant to high schools as well?

#### 4. *A Model for High Schools*

DAVID S. BRODER

In the following article, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David S. Broder, a political correspondent for the *Washington Post*, discusses alternative high schools.

The assigned readings for Aurora del Val's students . . . were sections of the writings of Greek philosopher Plato and black nationalist Malcolm X. For 90 minutes her 14 young scholars wrestled verbally with twin paradoxes: Plato's insistence that prisoners in a cave might find the shadows on the wall more real than the outside world, and Malcolm's declaration that his intellectual freedom began when he entered prison.

Prodded by their teacher's questions, the students grappled with the issues of appearance. The oddity is that these teenagers were all high school dropouts, kids who had walked out or been tossed out of their previous schools, kids with attitude problems, behavioral problems, drug or alcohol problems, kids whose teachers and families had often marked them off as hopeless losers.

And here they were in a voluntary program, run by the Portland Community College [in Oregon], where a single breach of discipline — an unexcused absence, an unfinished assignment, a blown test — would mean automatic expulsion, but where the curriculum was stiff enough to challenge an undergraduate at any of Portland's elite private colleges.

The Gateway to College program . . . is one of eight "early-college high school" programs supported in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and four other charities. They represent diverse approaches to a problem drawing increasing attention from the Bush administration and governors of both parties: how to make high school education more rigorous and ease the transition from high school to college or the workplace.

[In 2005] in Washington there [was] an "education summit" sponsored by the National Governors Association and Achieve Inc., a business-backed school reform group trying to stiffen high-school graduation requirements and improve the quality of the workforce. 5

Their concern [was] prompted by the fact that too many students are dropping out of high school, bored or dissatisfied with what it offers, and too many of those who graduate lack the skills needed for well-paying jobs or, if they go on to college, need remedial classes in English and math.

The Gateway experiment suggests that even for the hardest cases — teenagers with few credits, low grade-point averages and a host of personal problems — the challenge of a tough curriculum, backed by skillful teaching in small classes and plenty of personal counseling, can be a path to success.

Each new cohort of 20 or fewer students spends a semester together, with intensive focus on basic skills, including study techniques and classroom communication. Bonding during this term builds mutual support and helps motivate students to keep up their work. “They’ve become like family,” del Val said of her students. “They are real supportive of each other.”

After one term, the students move into the regular community-college adult classes, with the goal not only of completing their 12th-grade requirements but picking up enough college credits to qualify for an associate (two-year) degree.

The program has been judged a success. Among the first 600 students enrolled, attendance in the first term averaged 92 percent, and 71 percent successfully completed it. Almost nine out of 10 continued in regular community-college classes, working toward their diplomas and two-year degrees. 10

The Gates Foundation was impressed enough to double the original \$5 million grant [in 2004], enabling Gateway to expand its national network from eight campuses to 17, including one in Maryland’s Montgomery County.

But the most important testimonials come from the students whose lives have been changed. Kathy Kraus, dressed all in black and wearing a bowler hat, said, “The teachers here have encouraged me to write poems and essays. I never had that.”

Scott Weidlich said he was being home-schooled but his parents “never really cared and I wasn’t motivated.” Jessica Smidt said, “My old classes were so full of kids and most of the teachers didn’t want to be there. Here, you don’t get lost in the crowd.”

Chris Marks said, “My high school was swamped with drugs — and so was I. Here, I feel a real sense of responsibility. You’re not being watched. It’s your ass, and your life, and you either make the most of this opportunity or you don’t. It’s up to you.”

Del Val, who almost abandoned teaching after seeing how “overwhelmed and overworked” her friends were, shuffling students through five large classes a day in typical high schools in California, said it is enormously satisfying to see the way students respond in this environment. 15

It is clear that even high school dropouts are capable of much more than most of them are being asked to do. The question is whether the country can afford to waste their talents.

### Questions

1. How do the first two paragraphs serve David Broder's purpose of writing about alternative high schools?
2. What does Broder do to emphasize the academic rigor of the Gateway to College program?
3. How does he dispel or at least challenge the image of these students as "hopeless losers" (para. 2)?
4. According to Broder, why is it important to the community, even on a national level, to keep students from dropping out of high school?
5. In paragraph 10, Broder claims that the program he is describing "has been judged a success." How does he support this claim?

### 5. *U.S. Students Fare Badly in International Survey of Math Skills*

FLOYD NORRIS

In the following article, Floyd Norris reports on a study comparing the math skills of American students with those from different countries.

High school students in Hong Kong, Finland and South Korea do best in mathematics among those in 40 surveyed countries while students in the United States finished in the bottom half, according to a new international comparison of mathematical skills shown by 15-year-olds.

The United States was also cited as having the poorest outcomes per dollar spent on education. It ranked 28th of 40 countries in math and 18th in reading.

The study, released [December 7, 2004] by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a group based in Paris representing 30 nations, used tests given to students in 2003 and was intended to assess relative performance and to try to determine reasons for it.

"The gap between the best and worst performing countries has widened," said Andreas Schleicher, the official who directed the study and wrote the report.

The study compared student performance in 29 of the 30 countries in the organization, which includes all major industrialized nations, and in 11 other countries that chose to participate. Because of insufficient participation in the study, figures for Britain were not reported.

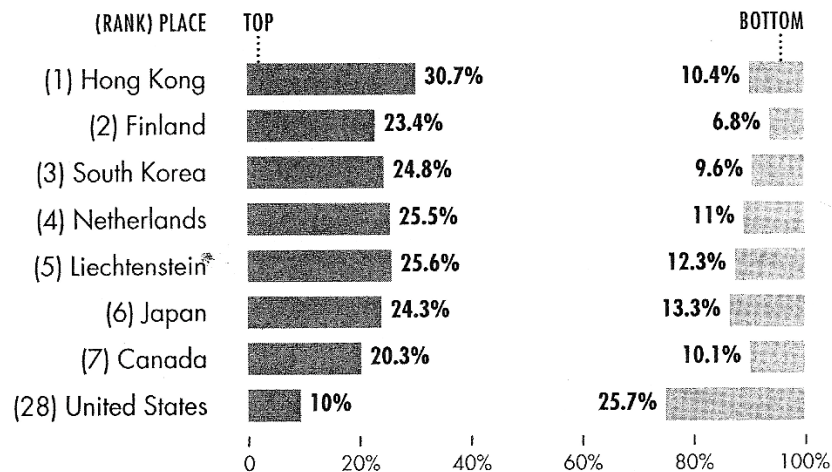
The study devoted less attention to reading than did a previous one in 2000, but it provided rankings that showed relatively little change.

Over all in reading, the top countries were Finland, South Korea, Canada and Australia. The United States finished 18th, higher than nations like Denmark, Germany and Hungary, all of which had students who performed better in math than American students did.

## Fuzzy on Math

Results of international testing on the mathematic skills of 15-year-olds show the skills of teenagers in the United States trailing those of their foreign counterparts.

Percentage of students whose scores fell into the top two scoring groups or the bottom two:



Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Reprinted by permission of the *New York Times*.

The study looked not only at the average performance of students, but also at how many from each country were top performers. It separated students into seven groups, ranging from Level 6, the best, to Level 1, which the authors viewed as a minimal level of competence. The remaining students were below the first level, a category that included more than half the students in Brazil, Indonesia and Tunisia.

In the United States, 10 percent of the students were in one of the top two groups, less than half as many as in Canada and a third the total of the leader, Hong Kong, which had 30.7 percent of its students in the top two categories.

Finland had the smallest percentage of underperforming students, with 6.8 percent.

The evaluation asked questions that were intended to test the ability of students to recognize what mathematical calculations were needed, and then to perform them, and to deal with questions that they would confront as citizens. Mr. Schleicher said that students in countries that emphasized theorems and rote learning tended not to do as well as those that emphasized the more practical aspects of mathematics.

The survey also questioned students about their own views of themselves and their work, and found that while good students were more likely to think

they were good, countries that did well often had a large number of students who did not feel they were doing well. In the United States, 36 percent of the students agreed with the statement, “I am just not good at mathematics,” while in Hong Kong, 57 percent agreed. In South Korea the figure was 62 percent.

Of the United States students, 72 percent said they got good grades in mathematics, more than in any other country. In Hong Kong, only 25 percent of the students said they got good marks, the lowest of any country.

The study said that while girls typically did only a little worse than boys on the test, “they consistently report much lower interest in and enjoyment of mathematics” and “much higher levels of helplessness and stress in mathematics classes.”

Regarding spending, the study concluded that “while spending on educational institutions is a necessary prerequisite for the provision of high-quality education, spending alone is not sufficient to achieve high levels of outcomes.”

It noted that while the Czech Republic spent only one third as much per student as the United States did, it was one of the top 10 performing nations in the study, while the United States performed below the average of the nations surveyed.

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### Questions

1. Summarize the major findings of the study reported in Floyd Norris’s article. Identify who was assessed, how, and by whom.
2. What were the major findings in this study regarding both the performance and attitude of U.S. students?
3. According to this study, how did money spent per student correlate with student performance?



## 6. *The Spirit of Education* (painting)

NORMAN ROCKWELL

Following is a Norman Rockwell painting, *The Spirit of Education*, that was featured on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1934. A popular and prolific artist in his own time, Rockwell was known for his depiction of positive American values.

### Questions

1. Examine the props carefully. What are the “tools” of education, according to Norman Rockwell’s image?
2. On the basis of the visual depiction alone, who is excluded from Rockwell’s vision of education?



3. What assumptions about education does Rockwell make in this illustration?
4. In 1934, the United States was in the midst of the Great Depression. How does this painting encourage an optimistic outlook on the future?

### Entering the Conversation

As you respond to the following prompts, support your argument with references to at least three of the sources in *Conversation: Focus on the American High School*. For help using sources, see Chapter 3.

1. Write an essay explaining whether you agree with Leon Botstein's critique of the American high school (p. 153).
2. Using the texts in *Conversation: Focus on the American High School*, as well as your own insights into high school, identify two serious problems,

and propose recommendations for addressing them. Cite at least two sources from the Conversation in your response.

3. John Dewey, the father of experiential education, described the interaction of education and democracy as follows:

Democratic society is peculiarly dependent for its maintenance upon the use in forming a course of study of criteria which are broadly human. Democracy cannot flourish where the chief influences in selecting subject matter of instruction are utilitarian ends narrowly conceived for the masses, and, for the higher education of the few, the traditions of a specialized cultivated class. The notion that the "essentials" of elementary education are the three R's mechanically treated, is based upon ignorance of the essentials needed for realization of democratic ideals. . . . A curriculum which acknowledges the social responsibilities of education must present situations where problems are relevant to the problems of living together, and where observation and information are calculated to develop social insight and interest.

—*Democracy and Education*, 1916

Write an essay explaining the extent to which you believe that high schools today are preparing citizens to achieve Dewey's vision. Draw on your experience and observation, and cite at least three of the sources from the Conversation to develop your argument.

4. Suppose you could choose to attend either a high school that emphasizes vocational education, including training in specific job skills and required internships, or a high school that emphasizes the liberal arts. Which would better prepare you to participate in a global economy? Explain why.