

# Session 1: Trends in Educational Attainment and Achievement

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## Heard on the Street

*“We had the lead and blew it”*

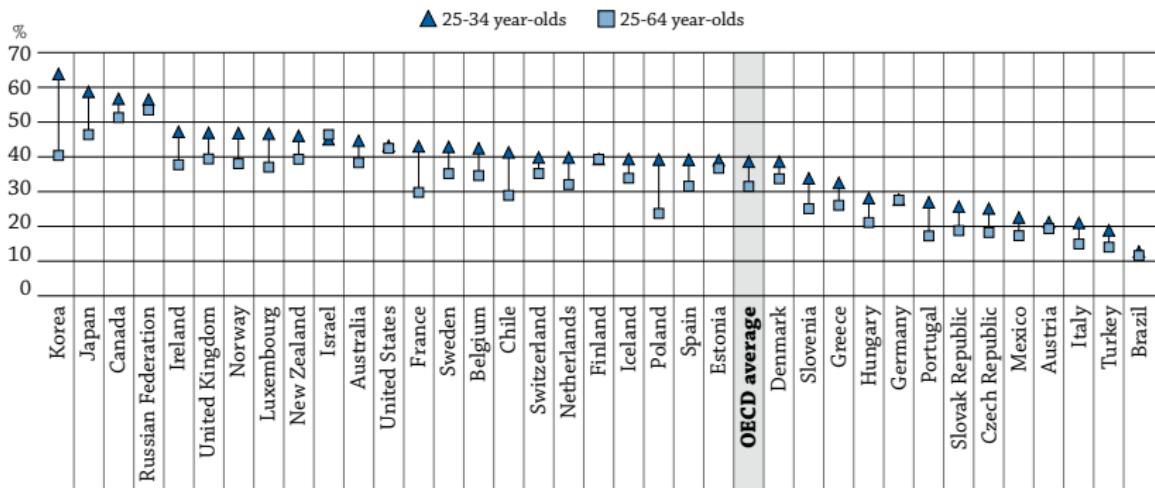
From Tuesday's *Wall Street Journal* on new OECD achievement test of “problem solving in technology rich environments”

# Our Agenda

1. “To what extent have educational outcomes in the U.S. been stalling compared to other countries?”
2. Discuss trends in attainment and achievement
3. What and how could a study contribute?

# The kind of evidence used to illustrate “blown lead” (OECD)

**Chart A1.1. Population that has attained tertiary education (2011)**  
*Percentage, by age group*



Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of 25-34 year-olds who have attained tertiary education.

Source: OECD. Table A1.3a. See Annex 3 for notes ([www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm)).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932846215>

## A 'stall' in High School Graduation? (Goldin)

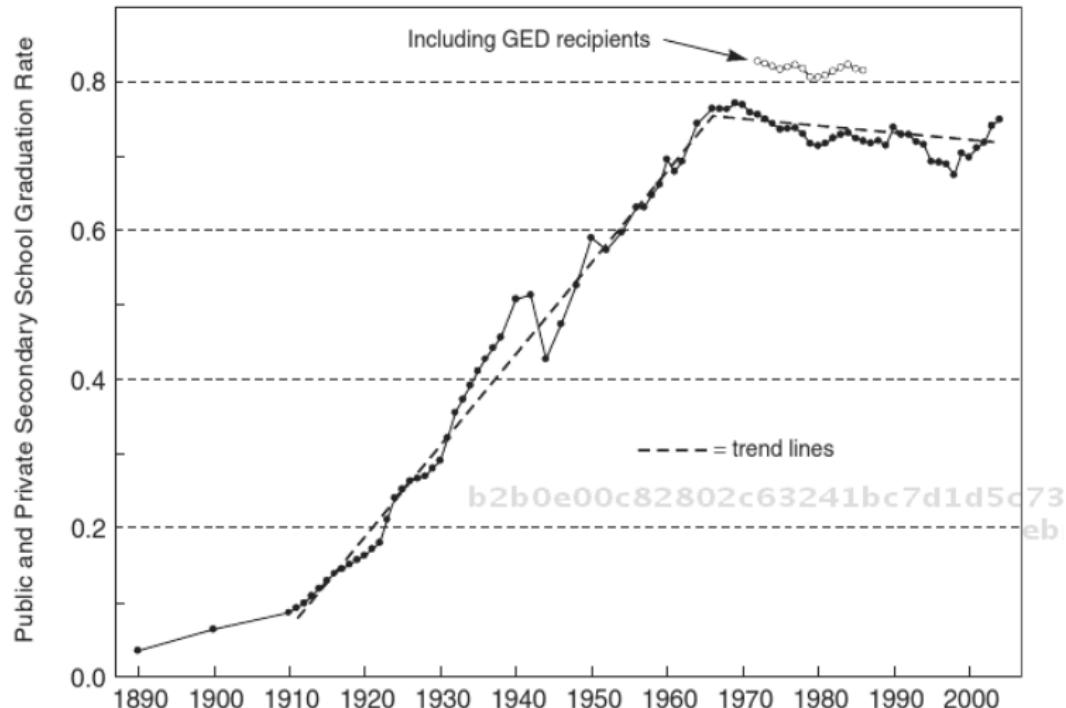


Figure 9.2. Public and Private Secondary School Graduation Rates: 1890 to 2004.

# More recent 'uptick' in High School Graduation? (Murnane)

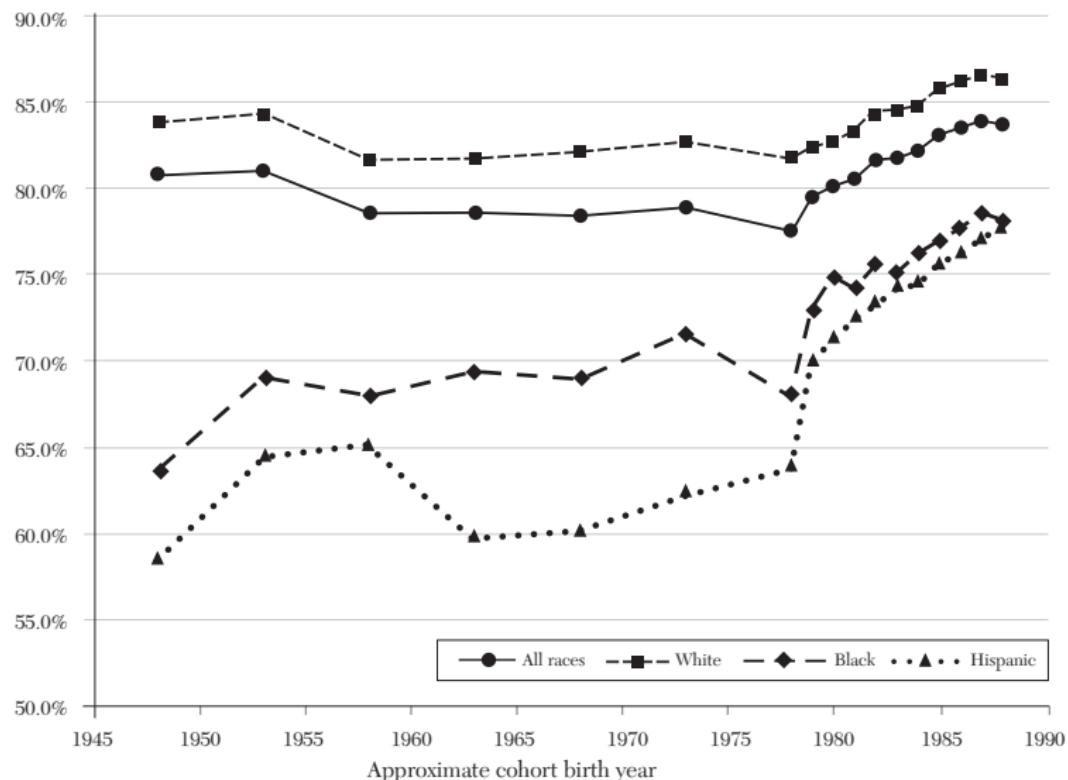
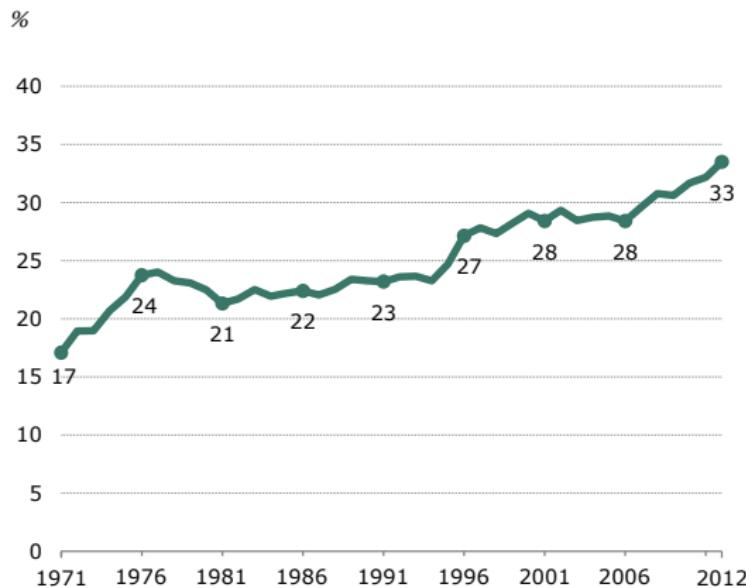


Figure 1. U.S. High School Graduation Rates for 20-24 Year Olds

# Steady progress on college degrees? (Pew)

## Share of 25- to 29-Year-Olds Completing Four-Year College Degrees, 1971-2012



Note: The educational attainment question was changed in 1992. Before 1992, persons completing at least four years of college are considered to have completed at least a four-year college degree.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of March Current Population Surveys, 1971-2012

# Achievement: not a top scorer? (Carnoy)

TABLE 1

Overall average national scale scores, reading and math, for U.S. and six comparison countries, PISA 2009

	TOP SCORING				SIMILAR POST-INDUSTRIAL				U.S.	U.S. VERSUS:	
	Canada	Finland	Korea	Average*	France	Germany	U.K.	Average*		Top-scoring average	Similar post-industrial average
Reading	524	536	539	533	496	497	494	496	500	-33	+4
Math	527	541	546	538	497	513	492	501	487	-50	-13

\* Simple (unweighted) average of three countries

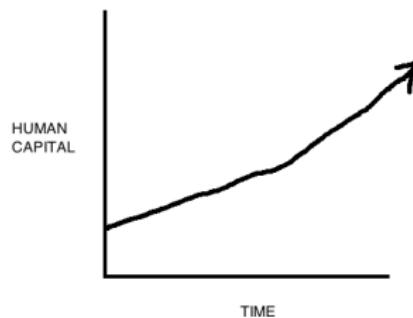
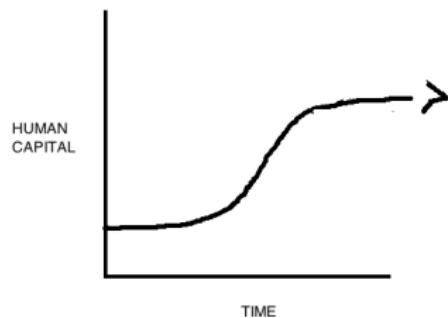
**Source:** Authors' analysis of OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2010)

## My take

- ▶ Much of industrialized world has caught up
- ▶ Some signs of stall, *but also* of recent uptick
- ▶ Measuring attainment is hard, achievement even harder

# Meaning of 'blown lead' depends on historical process

Two alternative growth paths of Human Capital



Convergence in level, convergence in growth rate, or path-dependent divergence?