



Full of hope and excitement, we once again find ourselves at the beginning of a new school year! As reality hits and task lists grow, the excitement may soon fade; however, there are still spectacular things happening all over the country in education, as Jay Harnack, Superintendent in Sublette County School District #1, Pinedale, Wyoming reminds us in his recent blog (reprinted here with his permission). Are you celebrating your fireworks?

THERE'S SOMETHING TO SEE HERE

Posted on August 12, 2015 by [Jay Harnack](#)

If you're a fan of 80's comedies like I am, you count [Naked Gun](#) as one of the classics. The "[Nothing to See Here](#)" scene in this film is one of my favorites. Police Lt. Frank Drebin arrives on the scene of an exploding fireworks factory (where there is plenty to see) and emphatically states, "Move on, nothing to see here, please disperse!" As a movie character, its Drebin's propensity to miss the obvious that makes him funny.

Well folks, there are a lot of fireworks going off in terms of student performance in Wyoming, and I sincerely hope that we aren't about to have Drebin moment.

After the Wyoming Supreme Court cases on education funding significantly increased the funding level for all school districts, the expectation from legislators and the media was that student performance would rapidly increase. It didn't, and during this time it was quite common to hear concerns from legislators and the media that [Wyoming was not getting a good "bang for the buck" when it comes to education](#). And in truth, we weren't. But like all good investments, the return on the investment is rarely immediate.

Wyoming educators of all description have asked for patience, noting that change takes time. As a superintendent, I can speak personally to the fact that change in education does take time. This is an industry that deals with human performance factors, and changing the factors that positively influence teaching and learning requires a lot of professional development, as well as changes in practice and behaviors; endeavors that are certainly time intensive.

But fireworks are beginning to go off. A press release from the Wyoming Education Association noted that Senators Coe and Wasserburger, along with Representatives Northrup and Connolly, returned from the Council of State Governments-West (CSG West), and shared some positive numbers regarding education in Wyoming, that were presented to them in late July. Senator Coe and Representative Northrup are the co-chairs for the Education Committee. Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig, Professor of Education leadership and Policy Studies at the California Sacramento State University presented numbers to the CSG-West showing Wyoming leading the Western states in [NAEP/TIMSS Science](#) scores and sixth in the world.

Wyoming's [NAEP/TIMMS Math](#) scores also ranked first in the Western states and eighth in the world. The statistical calculations by the National Center for Educational Statistics also show that Wyoming is statistically tied for number two in the world in Science, behind Finland.

Unlike our state-wide student assessments, the NAEP/TIMMS test is a stable, nationally recognized assessment, given world-wide. Unlike our current state-wide student assessment, it can be used to make comparisons between the performance of Wyoming students and students in other states and countries.

The gains made by Wyoming schools the past few years, particularly in Math and Science, are no joke. Second in the world in Science! Sixth in the world in Math! These results represent a lot of hard work by educators all across Wyoming, and I can only wonder if the same degree of effort will be made by our legislators and newspapers in acknowledging our successes, as was exerted in noting the lack of progress. There are some significant fireworks to see here, and I genuinely hope that, collectively, we don't seek to temper the good news.

That being said, there's a broader point to be made. As an educator, I've been keen to point out that test results are merely a snapshot in time, and the success of students should not be based solely on these kinds of tests. It was all too easy for our critics to point to selected test scores and say that Wyoming education was failing. It would be just as easy for the K-12 education community to note these high scores and take our foot off the gas. Neither success, nor failure, are permanent states of being in education, and an over-reaction to either is detrimental to continuous improvement.

These scores are great news. They are fireworks. They are definitely something to see, and we should celebrate them. They are not however, arrival at our destination, or the finale. They are a way point on the road to continued success, just as failure is a different kind of way point on the same road. We still have a lot of work to do, but when educators, legislators, and members of the media all begin to place both failure and success within the context of process, rather than product, I believe we will ignite even greater student achievement growth in Wyoming.