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**From:** [Buddy Fish](#)

**To:** [drfish](#)

**Sent:** Thursday, February 16, 2006 10:42 AM

**Subject:** MAAR - global economy?

## Mississippi Association for Assessment Reform (MAAR)

In the light of the Presidents recent remarks on the ability of US students to compete in the global economy, it appears that we already have engineers who are out of work. Isn't there an implication that we don't need to test-abuse our children in math skills that they don't really need? It's not that we don't have enough qualified engineers. It's much more reasonable to see that we don't have enough **low-priced** engineers. In the next article from the Boston Globe, we see that parents are not nearly as worried as the Business Roundtable about our "competitiveness."

Even so, the speakers at this conference chose to blast education . . .

## Out of work? Go to grad school

Susan Ohanion suggests, "Instead of advising engineers to get Ph.D.s, maybe they needed a session on corporate-political realities."

### Andrew Leonard

Nothing gets engineers in Silicon Valley more riled than the prospect of losing their jobs to cheaper competition abroad. It is *the* hot-button issue, especially in the semiconductor industry, once the crown jewel of the Valley. So it's no big surprise that the topic of globalization was inescapable at last week's DesignCon conference in Santa Clara, Calif.

DesignCon bills itself as the "essential design engineering event" for semiconductor and electronic design engineers. That might seem like a narrow niche, but it goes to the heart of Silicon Valley's history, and it is an arena that both China and India are devoting tremendous resources to developing.

But judging by some of the coverage of panel discussions at the conference, engineers worried about their jobs got some tough love. During one panel discussion, speakers pointed the finger at the sorry state of math and science education in the United States. In another, panelists noted that engineers with advanced degrees were still in high demand. Out of work? Go back to school and learn some new skills.

Ed Sperling, the editor in chief of Electronic News, an industry trade magazine, moderated one of the panels. He summed up the issue in no-nonsense form last Friday, noting that he had received many letters since the panel and that "a common theme among the myriad comments is that engineers in the United States are toast."

While acknowledging that globalization and industry shifts "make it more difficult ... to earn a good wage and remain gainfully employed," he also stressed that in his view, it was not impossible.

The key, wrote Sperling, is education. "Globalization has done much to raise the minimum standard of education for engineers. The baseline for education in this market is higher than it was five years ago, and those engineers who are out of work or watching their

prospects slide should consider retooling their credentials. More companies these days are hiring engineers with master's and doctorate degrees. If you're not keeping up with your education, you're not keeping up with the changes in the market and you're not managing your own best asset."

Sperling made two other points that are worth grappling with. One is the pressure exerted on all levels of the "food chain" by the "convergence of various markets such as communications, data and video into the consumer market." Global competition in the consumer electronics business is brutal, and engineering salaries have borne the brunt of the constant downward pressure on prices. So when you get right down to it, who is responsible for the crunch -- CEOs looking for cheaper labor, or customers at Best Buy looking for a bargain?

The other, perhaps more controversial suggestion is that "with labor costs [in the developing world] rising at a rate far greater than in developed areas of the world, it won't be long before there is relative parity around the globe."

This may already be happening. During one of the panels, Ahmad Bahai, chief technology officer at National Semiconductor Corp., observed that Indian engineers used to cost one-sixth of a comparable U.S. engineer. Now, it's closer to one-third.

"I am not suggesting it is going to be even anytime soon, but if it gets down to about one-half, it's no longer a no-brainer [to outsource]," Bahai was quoted as saying by EE Times.

Just how long "it won't be long" is still a little vague, though, and advising out-of-work engineers to go back to school and pile on debt while struggling for a Ph.D. is unlikely to be greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm. No matter how you slice it, morale in Silicon Valley does not appear to be on the upswing.

— Andrew Leonard  
*Salon.com*  
2006-02-15

Parents, students fine with math, science

**Ohanian Comment;** A look at any jobs projections list shows that parents are more savvy than corporate politicos think they are. These skills for the Business Roundtable scream about the need for more math and science in schools as another way to blame the schools for the greed they pass off as the needs of the global economy.

**By Ben Feller**

WASHINGTON --Science and math have zoomed to the top of the nation's education agenda. Yet Amanda Cook, a parent of two school-age girls, can't quite see the urgency.

"In Maine, there aren't many jobs that scream out 'math and science,'" said Cook, who lives in Etna, in the central part of the state. Yes, both topics are important, but "most parents are saying you're better off going to school for something there's a big need for."

Nationwide, a new poll shows, many parents are content with the science and math education their children get -- a starkly different view than that held by national leaders.

Fifty-seven percent of parents say "things are fine" with the amount of math and science being taught in their child's public school. High school parents seem particularly content -- 70 percent say

their child gets the right amount of science and math.

Students aren't too worried, either, according to the poll released Tuesday by Public Agenda, a public opinion research group that tracks education trends.

Only half of children in grades six to 12 say that understanding sciences and having strong math skills are essential for them to succeed after high school.

This comes as congressional leaders, governors, corporate executives and top scientists have called for schools to raise the rigor and amount of math and science in school. In his State of the Union address, President Bush made the matter a national priority.

Yet where public officials and employers see slipping production in the sciences as a threat to the nation's economy, parents and students don't share that urgency.

"There's energy and leadership at the top, but there is a task to be done in getting parents and kids to understand some of the ideas," said Jean Johnson, executive president of Public Agenda. "You can do a lot from the top, but you can't do everything. Schools are local. The leadership needs to reach out and help the public understand the challenge."

This week, Bush said, "We can't be the leading country in the world in science and technology unless we educate scientists and young mathematicians." A panel of top scientists and business leaders has warned "the scientific and technical building blocks of our economic leadership are eroding at a time when many other nations are gaining strength."

As for parents and students? In theory, they say, more math and science would be good.

For example, 62 percent of parents say it is crucial for most of today's students to learn high-level math, like advanced algebra and calculus.

The story changes, though, when parents talk specifically about their kids' schools, and when the children relay their own experiences.

Students put a lack of science and math near the bottom of problems they see at school. They are much more worried about bad language, cheating or the pressure for good grades.

Most parents, meanwhile, say their kids are getting a better education than they did. Only 32 percent of parents say their child's school should teach more math and science.

If anything, parents are less worried about math and science these days -- not more.

In 1994, 52 percent of parents considered a lack of math and science in their local schools to be a serious problem. Now, only 32 percent say the same thing. During that time, states ramped up standards and testing, which seems to have affected parents' views.

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a nationally random sample of 1,342 public school students in grades six to 12, and of 1,379 parents of children in public school. The interviews were done between Oct. 30 and Dec. 29. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for the students and 4 percentage points for the parents.

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— Ben Feller, Associated Press  
*Boston Globe*  
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