

# Apples and Oranges Nonsense

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A lot of wrong, misleading, and irrelevant things are said about school system reform. When advocates of transformational change are guilty it is an honest mistake. Because such mistakes can be costly, I have highlighted them in previous blog posts, and many more in my book, *The School Choice Wars*. When apologist-advocates of the dreadful status quo say wrong, misleading, and irrelevant things, it is often shameful and shameless.

This is the [latest prominent example](#): Michael A. Rebell and Jessica R. Wolf of Columbia University's Campaign for Educational Equity use the 2012 Program for International Student Achievement (PISA) results to claim the U.S. school system works fine; that student poverty is the reason the system is low-performing compared to other countries. Before I describe the 'Apples and Oranges' nonsense underlying their claim, I want to remind you of two things: 1.) At the school system level, global [best is not great](#). There are some high-performing schools, but no high-performing countries; and 2.) that low performance of middle and upper class area schools is [well-documented](#).

Rebell and Wolf point out that, "U.S. schools with fewer than 25 percent of their students living in poverty rank first in the world (PISA) among advanced industrial countries." They compared our best school outcomes to country (school system-wide) averages; shameful and maybe shameless!?!?!? An apples to apples comparison is schools vs. schools, or countries vs. countries. We know from a [Jay Greene and Josh McGee study](#) that, "even the most elite U.S. suburban school districts often produce results that are mediocre when compared with those of our international peers." The Rebell-Wolf PISA data discovery is additional evidence, like

Hanushek's finding that replacing our 5-8% worst teachers with average teachers would make U.S. K-12 outcomes among the world's best, and the modest (non-trivial, but not big) differences between the PISA scores of the top-ranked countries and the middle of the pack, is that the best in the world is not that great. Rebell and Wolf argue that just improving students – leaving the system as is – will make us #1. But we know the U.S. school system can be improved a lot!!