

U.S. Schools Fall Behind China and India

By [Elizabeth Cook](#)

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Dr. Willard Daggett zig-zags across the stage of Keppel Auditorium, mimicking what students do when they get home from school.

They're text-messaging friends on their cell phones here, playing video games there, watching TV and maybe doing homework, all at the same time, he says. They're high-tech and high-speed.

And what do students encounter at school? Daggett comes to a standstill and pretends he's a teacher, "who ... to ... them ... seems ... slow ... and boring," he says, pausing between each word.

"Would ... you ... like ...me... to ... stop?" he asks. "Sorry I'm ... in ... charge."

The contrast illustrated one of the main points of Daggett's presentation Wednesday at the First Annual Education Summit, sponsored by Rowan Partners for Education.

The world outside the nation's schools is changing much faster than what's going on inside the schools, Daggett says — four to five times faster.

"I'm suggesting in the 21st century these kids need skills we never needed," Daggett said, addressing about 950 educators and business leaders in Keppel Auditorium.

A combination futurist, educator and motivational speaker, Daggett was back for his third appearance in Salisbury, having been here in 1992 and 1996. The head of the International Center for Leadership in Education in Schenectady, N.Y., he addressed the topic, "Education Challenge: Preparing Students for Our Changing World."

Here are some of the topics he addressed:

* "A Nation at Risk": Daggett reminded his audience of the 1983 report that said the nation's schools were not producing a competitive workforce, and that schools in other countries — Japan, especially — were doing a better job.

"I don't believe our schools are failing," Daggett said. The nation graduated a higher percentage of 18-year-olds last year than ever, he said. And U.S. schools aim for more than educational quality. They also embrace equity, he said, saying that two of his children — one severely mentally retarded, the other disabled by an automobile accident involving a drunk driver — would never had been able to get an education in some other countries.

"Excellence and equity are in conflict," Daggett said. "I can get you to excellence in a hurry; let me pick and choose who I'm going to educate."

The schools are not failing, he said, but they have to change if they're going to keep up with the changing world.

* Real-world knowledge: Schools and tests are good at helping students acquire knowledge in various disciplines, he said, but they fall short in preparing students to apply knowledge to the real world.

The push for education reform began in the 1980s, not because schools, teachers or parents demanded it, but because the business community did. "Our kids don't seem to know what to do," he said, "... except 'do school.' "

He illustrated the point with a video showing a man and a woman on an escalator that has come to a stop. "This is not good," the man says, and they both call for help.

* India and China: "India and China have awakened," Daggett said, and they are changing the world economy.

He gave the example of what in 1980 was a small fishing village in China, Shenzhen. By 2007, manufacturing was king in Shenzhen, and it had a metropolitan skyline.

Meanwhile, in Schenectady, GE has gone from employing 48,000 people to 1,200, Daggett said. Amsterdam, N.Y., once considered the rug capital of the country with 20,000 workers, now does not have a single job in that industry.

Daggett showed a list of five Chinese companies that did not exist 10 years ago but that now produce about 90 percent of the computers for the world's major computer companies.

Seattle has lost Microsoft's research and development center to India, Daggett said, and the United States is poised to lose a quarter of the corporate headquarters it has as more companies move to countries where labor is cheaper and skills are higher.

India, he said, has 168 million preschoolers who, by themselves, would be the fourth largest nation on the face of the earth. And India has recently reformed its education system.

To enter the ninth grade in China, he said, a student must have had one year of biotechnology and a year of physics.

"Thank God we don't live in either of those nations. ... Two of my children would not have been permitted to live," he said. "But those they do choose to educate are going to eat your kids' lunch. ..."

"What technology did to manufacturing, it is about to do to the information and service sector."

Everyone knows about call centers in India and elsewhere that handle customer service calls for American companies. But, Daggett said, if you had an MRI or a CAT scan done recently, chances are someone read that scan in Australia or India.

Technology makes it possible to move work to the workers, he said.

* Coming technology: The next big thing, according to Daggett, will be SPOT, or Smart Personal Object Technology, that will allow watches and other devices to do everything a Blackberry or PDA can do, with an integrated program that can project keyboards and screens onto larger surfaces.

"Keyboards and monitors are about to be gone," he said. Donate your Blackberry to a museum.

He also showed a photo of a person wearing "translation goggles" that the wearer could use when looking at material in one language to have it quickly translated to another.

What will this do to the way U.S. schools teach language? "Not a thing," he said. "Nothing else has impacted them. Why would this?"

Other nations nimbly change curriculum and retrain teachers, he said. Meanwhile, U.S. schools are stuck on a calendar set when youngsters helped harvest summer crops.

* No Child Left Behind: Daggett said everyone associates the federal accountability program with President Bush, but Sen. Ted Kennedy was actually its major sponsor. Kennedy sees education as a civil right of all children.

"And to educators in the room, if you don't like it, get over it," he said.

Teachers have too much on their plate, he said, and need to take something off. "Kids are coming to school to watch the teachers work."

His final advice to teachers: "Love the kids more than you love the course that you teach ... and let's invest in their future."