As accountants say, it’s all in the numbers. Consider these figures:

As of January 2010, the United States’ jobless rate stood at 9.7 percent. Yet for individuals with a bachelor’s degree or higher, the rate was substantially less — 4.9 percent. Conversely, for people who lack a high school diploma, the rate was noticeably higher — 15.2 percent.

Clearly, education matters. And it matters not just for the job seeker. America’s future in the global marketplace is at stake, too.

The United States faces challenges on myriad education fronts. High school graduation rates are depressingly low, college remediation rates are rising, adult literacy levels are too low, and the numbers of Americans earning advanced degrees in science and engineering are lower than they have been in years.

High school dropout rates in the United States are at or near 30 percent. For African American and Hispanic students, the rate is even higher — a staggering 50 percent. Even for those who do graduate from high school and make their way to college, many require some kind of remedial instruction.

America’s leaders are beginning to gauge the seriousness of the issue. In his 2009 address to a joint session of Congress, President Obama pledged that “by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.”

This will be a significant challenge. Of the nation’s 307 million people, 93 million adults do not possess the necessary literacy levels to enter either postsecondary education or job-training programs, according to the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Demanding jobs

Making matters even more challenging, the educational attainment level required for jobs continues to rise. Anthony Carnevale, Director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, estimates that by 2018, nearly two-thirds of all jobs in the United States will require some form of postsecondary education or training. In 1973, just 28 percent of jobs, or less than one-third, required such instruction.

The demand for workers to obtain meaningful credentials has never been more important. America’s education system is critical in this effort.

The United States has long prided itself on its leadership in innovation. Much of this innovation has come from expertise in science and engineering. America’s lengthy run atop the innovation scoreboard, some suggest, might be near the end. They point to the fact that the nation’s science and engineering workforce is aging. A serious skills shortage in these fields could be imminent if not enough graduates are produced to replace retiring scientists and engineers.

Knowledge for the economy

The implications are wide ranging, even affecting national security. For example, many jobs in U.S. defense industries require that an American citizen fill the position. According to the National Science Board’s Science and Engineering Indicators 2008 report, students from abroad attending American colleges in 2007 received 24 percent of master’s degrees in science and engineering, and 33 percent of doctoral degrees in the two disciplines. Fifty-five percent of all postdoctoral students in science and engineering in fall 2005 were temporary visa holders, according to the Board. A shortage of workers for information-sensitive positions is a possibility.

The United States Patent and Trademark Office tells a similar story. In a report issued in 2009 by IFI Patent Intelligence, 51 percent of new patents went to companies outside the United States. Although IBM® received the most patents of any company (4,186 patents), overall, American firms seem to be slipping: Of the 10 companies receiving the most patents in 2008, only four were American.
An economy that emphasizes knowledge requires that everyone should be able to decipher, synthesize and analyze information, and then convey it — clearly and concisely. Innovation and problem solving are built upon such thinking.

Supporting innovation

Not long ago, America topped the list of many key education and innovation indicators. Today, looking at the same indicators, America is a nation falling behind. And since global competitiveness is certainly a top priority for the nation’s businesses, we need to fix the problem.

Simply stated, the United States cannot compete without strong national policies that support innovation. These policies include:

- increasing the focus on science, technology, engineering and math education
- implementing internationally benchmarked standards and assessments to reflect readiness for college, the workplace and the global marketplace
- aligning high school graduation requirements, state academic achievement standards and postsecondary entrance requirements
- leveraging data systems to inform instruction, improve teaching, and aid interventions
- ensuring that job training is relevant for jobs that exist today and for jobs in the future

For the United States to stay competitive globally, the American education system — from pre-kindergarten through high school to postsecondary education and job-training programs — must adopt a can-do attitude regarding such policies.

Human capital is the country’s greatest asset. This asset must be nurtured for the nation to reach its full potential. It’s time for the nation to take a full accounting of its education system. The numbers do not lie.

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For more than 40 years, students and universities in Latin America have been using an assessment that supports admissions decision making and helps predict academic success in graduate studies.

ETS created the EXADEP™ test, (Examen de Admisión a Estudios de Posgrado™) (Graduate Studies Admission Exam) in 1968 with the sponsorship of several higher education institutions. It was first known as the PAEG (Prueba de Admisión para Estudios Graduados) test.

Today, the EXADEP test is taken by thousands of Spanish-speaking students at the institutions where they hope to pursue graduate studies in a range of fields, including agricultural sciences, art, business, communications, information technology, criminal justice, education, engineering, health and medical sciences, humanities, law, liberal arts, psychology, public administration, religion and theology, science, social sciences, and social work.

Success in Bogotá

One of the newest additions to the growing family of EXADEP exam users is the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. UniAndes, which offers 32 graduate programs, conducted its first EXADEP test administration in November 2009. More administrations are planned.

“Our first administration was very successful thanks to careful planning and the presence of ETS officials,” says Alejandro Rico Restrepo, head of admissions at UniAndes.

As is the case with other ETS assessments, research conducted by ETS staff and by independent university researchers has established the validity of the EXADEP test for use in university admissions.

“We are very pleased with our relationship with UniAndes and the many other universities in Latin America that use the EXADEP exam,” says David Payne, ETS’s Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for College and Graduate Programs. “It is a source of great satisfaction to know that this test has proved to be such a useful tool for advancing careers in many critical areas.”

More information about the EXADEP test is available at [www.ets.org/exadep](http://www.ets.org/exadep).