

# Canada urged to demand same standards in education as in hockey

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By Trevor Howell, Calgary Herald February 19, 2014  
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“How can we be satisfied with 13th place in math when we’re not satisfied with second place in hockey?” former deputy prime minister John Manley, and current president and CEO of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, said to Calgary audience on Wednesday.

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**Photograph by:** Simon Hayter , The Ottawa Citizen

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John Manley, Canada’s former deputy prime minister, has two concerns about the country’s place on the international stage.

Manley’s immediate worry is that the nation may experience a collective meltdown if Canada’s men’s Olympic hockey team doesn’t defeat its U.S. rival in Friday’s semifinal game in Sochi.

But his second concern — inarguably of more weight — is that Canadians don’t express similar outrage and disbelief when international testing shows the country’s students, and adults, have been faring worse in math, science and literacy over the past decade.

“How can we be satisfied with 13th place in math when we’re not satisfied with second place in hockey?” Manley told a crowd of teachers, industry professionals, school board members and provincial politicians in Calgary on Wednesday.

Manley, who now serves as president and CEO of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, was one of several speakers at a one-day symposium focused on Alberta’s ongoing Inspiring Education.

The CCCE, which represents more than 100 CEOs and entrepreneurs, has recently turned its attention toward education and skills training.

In January, the CCCE released the first in a series of papers and reports delving into the skill challenges facing Canada. That report said the teacher compensation model — based on seniority and academic credentials — needs an overhaul, though it stopped short of calling for a pure merit-based system.

While Manley’s delivery during Wednesday’s gathering was lighthearted, his message was far more serious.

Recent test results from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development show Canada continues its 12-year slide in international scores in math, reading and science. National testing has shown similar trends.

Not only does the country need to reverse that downward trend, it has to take a hard look at how it plans to adequately prepare its students to succeed in a world that is rapidly being driven by “unprecedented economic, social and technological changes,” said Manley.

“The differentiating factors between our country and so many more are being obliterated by communications, transportation and technology that are changing the face of the world we live in,” he said.

“Increasingly, our future competitiveness and our future prosperity will depend on the skills, the knowledge and the agility of our people.”

It’s already being felt by some of the Canada’s largest employers and companies who are experiencing skilled worker shortages across the country — particularly in Alberta.

“Right now, technical skills, IT skills and skilled trades are in high demand,” said Manley. “But the common denominator across the economy is that everywhere employers are looking to recruit young people with a strong complement of soft skills, such as the ability to communicate, think critically and to work in teams.”

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