

U.S. Students Win the 2016 Math Olympiad

Earlier this week, news came out that a group of U.S. students had won the 2016 International Math Olympiad.

As the [Washington Post](#) noted, such news is surprising, particularly since the U.S. team was the reigning champion from 2015, a title they finally snagged after losing for 21 years.

I was encouraged reading about the U.S. team's success, and the thought crossed my mind that perhaps American math skills weren't as awful as we've been led to believe.

The numbers, however, tell a different story.

Only [25 percent](#) of American high school students were proficient in math in 2015 (chart). Of that number, only [three percent](#) measured as advanced. And in international rankings, the [U.S. places 26th](#), coming in [behind countries](#) such as Vietnam, Poland, and Latvia. With numbers like these, it's no wonder that Americans were unable to capture the Math Olympiad title for 21 years.



So why are they winning now?

Some words from the head of the U.S. math team, coach Po-Shen Loh, may shed some light on the issue:

“I think that we see excellence springing up all around the country because of the growth and adoption of free online resources, which can combine nicely with the creative and open culture of our education system,” he said in an email. ‘It is now becoming possible for any student who wants to excel at math to do so, no matter where they come from, or

what their local resources look like. This is accessible to the mainstream, and isn't just for people with existing ability.'"

Did you catch that? Although Loh gives a nod to the education system, he infers that the initiative and work students do on their own is a main factor in the success of his team.

For many years the education system has convinced us that they are the experts who know how to set a child down, pour information into him, and send him on his merry way 12 years later prepared to face the world. But is this really the case?

If we want our children to be well-rounded students equipped for the future, are we going to have to encourage them to be [self-educators](#) who embrace and explore learning beyond the four walls of our factory-like education system?

Image Credit: Jonah G.S. bit.ly/1eBd9Ks