

WASH POST

Friday, May 15, 1998

202-994-8698 Fax

Iris C. Rotberg

202-994-1100 / 3:30pm

HEALTH & SCIENCE

Pin Juy

Research professor
George Washington University

17

Professor faults study that found U.S. students lagging in math, science

Associated Press
 WASHINGTON — A widely publicized test that showed U.S. 12th-graders trailing other countries in math and science was based on flawed methods that distorted the results, a professor contended Thursday in a scientific journal.

Iris C. Rotberg, research professor of education at George Washington University, said the Third International Mathematics and Science Study "tells us little about the quality of

education" in the United States or other countries. The critique appeared in *Science*.

The latest test results, released in February, showed U.S. 12th-graders performed below the international average in a 21-nation comparison of students in their final year of secondary school. They did even worse in a comparison of those who took physics and advanced mathematics.

President Clinton called the results inexcusable.

The critique, however, says the international comparisons are invalid because the characteristics and numbers of students varied from country to country.

In countries where fewer students finish school, for example, results are higher because the poorer students have been weeded out. Also, secondary school lasts longer in some countries, so "older, more advanced students" scored higher. Other students attended specialized schools that fo-

cused on science and math, while the Americans were chosen from all kinds of schools, even vocational ones.

Many of the criticisms have been expressed before, and the Education Department has addressed them in speeches and statements by Pascal D.

Forgione Jr., U.S. commissioner of education statistics.

Among Mr. Forgione's points:
 ■ The test is meant to compare students at a similar point in the educational system — the end of secondary

school — not students of the same age or year of schooling.

■ The age gap has been overstated. Although students from Iceland averaged 21.2 years and U.S. students, 18.1, the international average was 18.7

THE
 yeah-nice-teddy-honey-but-I've-gotta-go-ride

