

Report from Finland



Finland – Top Performer



- PISA Surveys – Programme for International Student Assessments
 - 15 year olds/every three years
- Sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- Sixty-four countries participated in 2009

Finish Values



- **Strong drive for Equity**
 - Matched by social services to ensure well being
- **Unique in its Trust of education professionals**
 - Support of the public school system
- **Worthwhile Investment**

“In Finland, we trust our teachers.”



- respect the profession
- select the best applicants
- educate content, pedagogy and research methods
- provide significant on-the-job training and mentoring
- require they earn a Masters degree
- quality professional development

Teachers



**Highly Valued – Like Doctors, Lawyers
Strict Selection Criteria for University**

- ✦ Only ten percent of applicants accepted
- ✦ Screening: test and an interview with groups of peers
- ✦ 90 percent of those accepted finish
- ✦ Very little burnout or turnover

More about teachers

- Principals hire teachers
- No seniority guarantee
- Principals- teachers too
- Lots of collaboration



Testing



- No mandated tests
- No ranking of schools
- Assessments within schools
- Teachers/principals conduct assessments

The System



- **Compulsory 9 years beginning at age 7**
 - Lower Primary
 - Upper Primary
- **Upper Secondary – not compulsory, but 90% go**
 - Academic high school – 60%
 - Vocational program – 40%
- **Vocational counseling**
- **No dead ends**

Aurora Primary School – Espoo

- Best thing, “Our Teachers”
- “So much cooperation among teachers, not just plan”
- “Solve problems here”
- Principal/Teacher Relationship
 - Assistance
 - Support



Aurora Primary School – Espoo



Principal's Philosophy



**“In the U.S. you say ‘No Child Left Behind.’
Here we say, no child, no teacher,
no cleaner (janitor)....left behind.
If we have the tools, we must help.”**

Languages



- Students speak at least three languages, and will generally learn four.
- English is mandatory and begins at grade three.
- Finland students learn “mother tongue,” usually Finnish. For five percent it is Swedish, and may be Sami.
- About 45 languages spoken in Helsinki. One significant immigrant population is Somali.

Religion, Ethics



Finnish children take religion or ethics studies, and choose among options that match their faith background, or an ethics or “philosophy of life” course.

After Upper Secondary



- **Matriculation Exam**
- **Graduates choose to apply to academic universities or to polytechnic universities.**
- **University education is free to students, and they receive a living stipend during their education.**
- **Young people are required to serve about nine months of military or civil service after high school.**

Early Childhood – Strong Family Support



- Children ages 0 – 6 have access to preschool
- At least 95 percent of children go to kindergarten
- The government guarantees a place in preschool or daycare
- Leave for caring for children
 - Mothers can get paid leave of up to 9 months
 - Three years unpaid, but with employer guarantee
 - Generous paternal leave options

School Meals



Other services, supports

- **Transportation**
- **Health Care**
- **Lunch**
- **School Assignment**





The Drive for Equity



- **Pasi Sahlberg**
 - Director General of the Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (CIMO) reforms
 - University of Louisville's 2013 Grawemeyer Award in education
- *Finnish Lessons, What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland*

Sahlberg Message



“Finland has never aimed to be Number One”

“We don’t think like that.”

“We want to have a school system where pupils’ success does not depend on their home background.”

Different Approaches



• Global Education Reform Movement

- Competition
- Test-Based Accountability
- Standardization
- Fear

• Finnish Way

- Collaboration
- Trust-Based Accountability
- Customization
- Well-Being

Learned a lot from the U.S.



- Not always high achieving
- Put in place some reforms beginning in the 1970s
- Traveled to countries with “empty suitcases”
- Stuck to its plan
- Key feature of the plan was teacher preparation

Finnish Modesty



- Finland's success is not a miracle.
- OECD Indexes
 - Child Poverty, Child Health/Well Being, Economic Competitiveness, Innovation

“What is surprising is that the U.S. does as well as it does given the inequities of its system.”

Finland's Challenges



- **Unemployment**
- **Dropouts**
 - “A national disgrace”
 - Upper grades compulsory like in the U.S.
- **Youth Guarantee**

Take-Aways



No new “secret” to success – *emphasis*



Kentucky Comments



- **Teacher preparation, Language development**
- **The ability in Finland to be more autonomous**
- **Reduced stress**
- **Trusted for their knowledge and professionalism**

What can we do now?



- Focus on early childhood – Be Bold
- Enhance teacher preparation
 - Support and respect educators
- Don't let accountability get in the way of seeing every child
- Value vocational education as a choice and provide a pathway

FINALLY...

Don't give up on our
system of public
education. Embrace it.

