



Policy Implications of Finland's Model for
**Teacher Preparation,
Support, and Autonomy**

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GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE FOR IMPROVING EDUCATION

Why Focus on Teachers?

Effective teachers lead to improved classroom learning and student performance

- Strategy with the most consistent research = teacher effectiveness
- On average, students whose teachers are well prepared and effective perform better on standardized tests and have higher rates of secondary school completion.^{1,2,3,4}

Finland as a Model

- Long-term reforms focused on teacher preparation and classroom teaching (reforms began in 1970s)
- High teacher retention – only 10% to 15% attrition⁵
- Common traits of Finland and Idaho
 - Similar demographics that are primarily heterogeneous, with growing diversity
 - Strong history of agriculture; economy shifting towards the business and service sectors
 - Technology sector

Finland's Academic Performance

PISA Scores Comparison^{6,7}

	PISA 2003			PISA 2006			PISA 2009		
	Reading	Math	Science	Reading	Math	Science	Reading	Math	Science
OECD Average	494	500	500	492	498	500	493	496	501
Finland	543	544	548	547	548	563	536	541	554
Sweden	514	509	506	507	502	503	497	494	495
USA	495	483	491	†	474	489	500	487	502

† Data not available

Finland's Teacher Preparation Structure

- Minimum of MA for all primary and secondary teachers (1st-12th grades) including a thesis focused on their intended area
- Minimum of BA for all pre-school and kindergarten teachers
- State picks up the tab for teacher education
- Teachers are paid slightly above the European average, with very little variation within scales

Finland's Teacher Preparation Structure

- Universities have coordinated teacher education curricula to ensure consistent instruction of high-priority pedagogies
- On the other hand, programs are given the freedom to tailor the implementation and content of many aspects of their curricula based on the university's resources and expertise
- Priority teaching methodologies are not only taught to teacher candidates, but are used during instruction in the teacher education programs

Key Instructional Methods

1) Research driven

- Teacher education is structured based on a “systematic analysis” of education⁸
- Research is integrated into all teaching & learning
- All programs require research methods
- Students are expected to integrate research into their practice of using “argumentation, decision-making and justification” to answer pedagogical questions⁸

Key Instructional Methods

2) Inquiry based & student guided

3) Practice oriented

- Practical experience starts early and is integral throughout the teacher preparation process
- The practicum year is considered clinical experience, integrating practice and research
- Specific schools receive student teachers; they are expected to be heavily involved in research and implementation of new strategies^{5,9,10}

Teacher Support & Autonomy

■ Support

- Problem-solving groups develop curriculum, and identify and implement research-based changes in their classrooms and schools

■ Autonomy

- Local schools and teachers are trusted to implement
- Non-teaching responsibilities and external testing are avoided to ensure that teachers can focus their classroom time on instruction
- No formal teacher evaluation – teachers receive feedback from their principal and colleagues

“The question of teacher education is timely. Academic education of teachers in Finland with a research-based approach has existed for 30 years....

The high scores of Finnish pupils in international comparisons suggest that teacher education in Finland has been on the right course.”¹⁰

Endnotes

- ¹ Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff (2009). "Teacher Preparation and Student Achievement." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* (V31-4).
- ² Ingvarson & Rowe (2008). "Conceptualising and evaluating teacher quality: substantive and methodological issues." *Australian Journal of Education* (V52-1).
- ³ Provasnik & Young (2003). "The relationship of teacher quality to student mathematics achievement at the 8th grade: Findings from the National Assessment of Education Progress (2000)." Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association (April 22, 2003).
- ⁴ Rowe (2002). "The Importance of Teacher Quality." *Issue Analysis* (No.22).
- ⁵ Sahlberg (2011). "Lessons from Finland." *The Professional Educator* (V35-2).
- ⁶ OECD(a). (n.d.) PISA Country Profiles, 2003, 2006. <http://pisacountry.acer.edu.au/index.php>
- ⁷ OECD(b). (n.d.) The PISA 2009 profiles by country/economy. <http://stats.oecd.org/PISA2009Profiles>
- ⁸ Toom et al (2010). "Experiences of a Research-based Approach to Teacher Education: suggestions for future policies." *European Journal of Education* (V45-2), pg 333.
- ⁹ Darling-Hammond (2010). "Soaring Systems: High-Flyers All Have Equitable Funding, Shared Curriculum, and Quality Teaching." *American Educator*, Winter 2010-2011.
- ¹⁰ Toom et al (2010). "Experiences of a Research-based Approach to Teacher Education: suggestions for future policies." *European Journal of Education* (V45-2), pg 331.