

LEARNING FROM

THE FINDINGS OF A DELEGATION OF NORTH CAROLINIANS
WHO STUDIED AND VISITED SCHOOLS IN FINLAND | FALL 2011

FINLAND



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LEARNING FROM

Finland

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> WHY WE TRAVEL & STUDY

“A century ago, the United States was among the most eager benchmarkers in the world. We took the best ideas in steelmaking, industrial chemicals and many other fields from England and Germany and others and put them to work here on a scale that Europe could not match. At the same time we were borrowing the best ideas in education, mainly from the Germans and the Scots. It was the period of the most rapid growth our economy had ever seen and it was the time in which we designed the education system that we still have today. It is fair to say that, in many important ways, we owe the current shape of our education system to industrial benchmarking. But, after World War II, the United States appeared to reign supreme in both the industrial and educational arenas and we evidently came to the conclusion that we had little to learn from anyone. As the years went by, one by one, country after country caught up to and then surpassed us in several industries and more or less across the board in pre-college education. And still we slept.”

An excerpt from “*Standing on the Shoulders of Giants*,” a report prepared for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development by the National Center on Education and the Economy, authored by Mark Tucker.

Benchmarking and learning from the best (and the rest) in the world. That is what spurred the Center for International Understanding (Center) and the Public School Forum (Forum) to begin a series of studies of educational systems across the world. Starting in 1995, those two organizations have taken hundreds of North Carolinians to see first-hand approaches to education that are very different than those used in the United States.

The first study focused on Japan which in the early 90s was considered a leader in education. The next trip was to Great Britain to study why a national voucher plan, started with much fanfare, was ended after the promise of vouchers failed to materialize.

More recently, the Center and the Forum have focused on countries which have successfully used education as the basic building block for economic development. India, for instance, may be the first (and only) country to leapfrog from agriculture to “knowledge work” because of its world-class educational Institutes. Singapore, the only country which the Center and Forum have revisited, succeeded in making a largely illiterate population one of the most literate and entrepreneurial populations in the world. Other countries studied include: Denmark, Ireland, South Korea, the Netherlands and China.

In all cases, the goal of the studies has been to learn from countries that are leaders in education in the hopes that those lessons will translate into positive policy changes that will make schools in North Carolina second to none. What follows is what has been learned from an examination of Finland, which is currently ranked as one of the educationally highest performing nations in the world.



WHY FINLAND?

In recent years, researchers from around the world have been descending on Finland because of its high overall performance in education. Not only is Finland one of the highest ranked nations in educational performance, it has the distinction of having one of the narrowest gaps between its lowest performing students and its highest performing students – a gap that usually mirrors gaps in family income, one of the largest challenges faced by American schools that are struggling to raise the performance level of low-income students across the United States.

The comparisons of student performance of Finland and the United States are sobering. The chart below shows where Finland ranks compared to the countries in the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results which compare the educational performance of students in 64 industrialized countries.

AREA OF STUDY	AVERAGE*	FINLAND STUDENTS	US STUDENTS
Reading	493	536	500
Math	496	541	487
Science	501	554	502

** Average scores of students in 64 countries.*

While the United States is barely above average, or, as in the case in math, well below average, Finland is well above average in reading, math and science.

The purpose of the “Learning from Finland” study was to examine how teachers in Finland are trained, how they teach and assess learning, and how Finland’s investment in early education paid dividends. In short, what are they doing that makes them a world leader in learning and what could North Carolina learn from it?

FINLAND THE COUNTRY

Before turning to education, a word or two about Finland is in order. Suffice it to say that not only is Finland very different than North Carolina, it is very different from virtually all other countries. It has a language totally unlike English or other Romance languages (i.e., French, Spanish, etc.). Similar languages can only be found in Estonia and Hungary. The Finnish language has 15 cases for nouns, 160 verb conjugations, no articles and no gender specific words.

One-half of the people in the world living above the 60th parallel (which is where Helsinki, the national capital is located) are in Finland. If one adds up all of the people in the world living in northern locations at or above the 60th parallel, including Canada, Iceland, Russia, Sweden, Norway and Alaska, they make up less than one-half of those living in extreme northern areas – the rest are Finnish.

With fully one-fourth of Finland inside the Arctic Circle, one would expect Finland's population density to be sparse. And it is. Over 70% of Finland is forest land. Another 10% is composed of lakes – more lakes than any country in the world, 187,888 to be exact. The majority of Finland's people live in the coastal cities and communities in the southernmost part of the country – roughly one-fifth of the population is in the greater Helsinki area.

Finland is not a large nation. Its population is only 5.4 million, and it is much more homogeneous than the United States. Roughly 5-6% of the population speaks Swedish and has distinctly different cultural and linguistic traditions than do the Finns. The largest immigrant groups to have been granted citizenship are Russians, Somalians and Vietnamese. Recently, as a result of the European Union opening up the doors to movement across national boundaries, Finland is experiencing an influx of newcomers, but it remains a very homogeneous nation.

A TROUBLED HISTORY

While most in the United States view the Scandinavian countries as among the most peaceful and immune from conflict in the world, that has not been the case in Finland. In the early 1700s, Finland was a small, agrarian nation, with the dubious distinction of being located between two much larger and more advanced nations, Sweden and Russia. Early in the 1700s Finland was taken over by Sweden and for over 600 years was under Swedish rule. During that time, a “burgher” class emerged, largely composed of Catholic bishops and Swedes – subsequently, to this day Swedes are often described as Finland's “old money” group.

In 1809 Sweden and Russia were at war and Russia succeeded in gaining control of what is now Finland. From 1809 until 1917, Russia ruled Finland; albeit, it encouraged Finland to develop.







“Finland has a capitalistic, free market economy built on a social welfare foundation.”

Under Russian rule, universal free education was introduced. Finland’s first university was established. Finland created its own stamps and currency. The Finnish language re-emerged after years of the people speaking Swedish.

The 1917 Russian revolution coincided with a growing Finnish movement for independence. While Russia was in turmoil in the aftermath of its revolution, Finland declared independence, sparking a civil war between the “reds” who favored continued alignment with Russia and the “whites” who favored independence. The whites gained military support from Germany and Finland became a truly independent nation.

That, however, did not end Finland’s troubled relationship with its powerful neighbors. Two more wars with Russia occurred, one resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides of the conflict which was waged in -40 degree weather. Russia prevailed and Finland was forced to cede roughly 10% of its land mass to Russia.

Finland continues to have a complicated relationship with Russia. It is one of Finland’s largest trading partners and many Russians have made Finland home. During the cold war, Finland stayed neutral. However, following the break-up of the Soviet Union Finland aligned with the European Union and was one of the first countries to formally recognize former Russian satellite countries such as Estonia.



POST-WORLD WAR II, FINLAND DEVELOPED RAPIDLY

Wars, occupation, tradition and climate kept Finland a relatively poor, agrarian nation up to the Second World War. Following the war, however, Finland began to change and the change was rapid and profound. As in most countries when industrialization begins there was a large migration of Finns from rural areas to the cities. National policies stimulated growth in the private sector and Finland’s high level of education and training began to pay dividends.

Today, agriculture is only a small fraction of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Instead, Finland has a well-balanced economic mix of manufacturing, forestry products, chemical manufacturing and service jobs.

Fully one-third of Finland’s GDP comes from exports. Its largest trading partners are: Germany, Russia, Sweden, Great Britain, the United States, and, more recently, China.



PROGRESS HAS NOT BEEN LIMITED TO A CHANGED ECONOMIC BASE

Working in tandem with the drive to change the economic base of Finland were policies aimed at bettering the standard of living for Finns. One of the driving principles of Finland's founders in 1917 was to have social policies that reduced tensions among social classes.

The nation has stayed true to that principle and Finland has created a social welfare society that has few parallels in the world. While those policies (and taxation levels) fly in the face of current thinking in the United States, consider the following:

1. 76% of health care is provided by the government (i.e., hospital care, free; dental care, free; 75% of lab tests covered; 50% of prescriptions covered).
2. Rated #4 in the world on child well-being (by UNICEF).
3. Rated #1 in the world on low rates of child still birth (UNICEF).
4. Rated one of the most "peaceful, competitive and livable nations in the world."
5. Rated "best place for women to live;" first to grant women the vote (1906).
6. Highest rate in the world on books borrowed at libraries.
7. One of the highest per capita numbers of newspapers and books published.
8. The highest in the per capita number of children's books published.
9. 83% of homes have Internet access.
10. 60% of population owns homes.
11. Finland's national pension system provides 60% of the average of a retiree's last four years of income if he/she was in the private sector; for retirees from the public sector, the rate is 66% of their final four-year average salary.
12. One of the highest rated countries in educational performance.

It is worth noting that while the social infrastructure of Finland is built on welfare state principles, the nation is also ranked as one of the most competitive in terms of its policies toward business. In a briefing of the North Carolina delegation, Pasi Sahlberg, author of the book "Finnish Lessons," described it this way, "Finland has a capitalistic, free market economy built on a social welfare foundation."

TURNING TO EDUCATION

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With that as an introduction to Finland, it is time to turn to the Finnish educational system. It must be noted that of all the countries the Center/Forum studies have examined, Finland's educational system is more different from that in the United States than any yet studied. Consider these differences.

- Finland has day care programs beginning for children as young as 8 months old and continuing to age 6. The staffing ratios for these programs far exceed anything available in most American cities. For every 12 students under the age of 3 there is one trained educator and two nurses. For every 20 students between 3 and 6 there is one trained educator and two nurses.
- At age 6 a voluntary pre-school year is offered.
- Neither the day care nor the pre-school programs formally “teach” letters, reading or math. The focus is on socialization, preparing to go to school and working in groups.
- Formal school does not begin until age 7.
- High-stake tests are not administered in elementary school or in North Carolina's equivalent of middle school, or junior high. In classrooms, teachers frequently administer tests; however, the purpose of testing is diagnostic and is used to better individualize instruction.
- At the end of ninth grade, students have an option to leave school (presuming they have reached age 16). Compulsory education ends at the ninth grade.
- Unlike North Carolina (and the rest of the United States), students are separated at the high school level. Some will attend occupational/technical schools; others will attend gymnasiums, or academic high schools preparing students for college.
- On completion of upper secondary school (North Carolina's high school), students take a “high stakes” test. This one, for students wanting entrance to college, will largely determine whether they are admitted to college.
- Upon completion of secondary school (high school), students have the option of university (there are roughly 20 colleges/universities in Finland) or Polytechnic Schools (there are 30).
- Tuition, room and board for college are subsidized by the government.





LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

What Lessons Can Be Learned From a System So Different?

Recent studies have found common denominators in the world's highest performing countries – Finland being one of them. Focusing on building the capacity of the country's teaching work force, rigorous expectations for all students, and education focused on economic development are the hallmarks of high performing educational countries. What follows are the lessons North Carolinians learned about Finland's journey to be one of the world's highest performing systems of education.

1

LESSON ONE:

High Performance Begins With Teachers

In 1973 Finland's school system was not one to be admired. The country's economy was still largely based on agriculture. Student scores on tests measuring the performance of young people in different countries were mediocre. The level of education in the country was below that of leading industrial countries.

Finnish policymakers made a decision that would be considered advanced today – in 1973 it was beyond advanced. They determined that all teachers, elementary and secondary would have to earn Masters Degrees and that the degree programs would include a rigorous blend of research and practical experience.

It took over a decade for that decision to begin to pay dividends, but dividends it paid. Today, Finland's teachers are among the world's best prepared and best performing. Additionally, the problem of equal distribution of quality teachers has been solved in Finland. Unlike North Carolina, the quality of teachers in rural and low-income areas of the country is not different from that of its cities. All teachers in Finland have undergone the same rigorous preparation program and young people regardless of their "zip codes" are being taught by well-prepared teachers.

2

LESSON TWO:

...time for planning, time for working with colleagues, and time to grade papers during the work day, not at home in the evening.

Finland Attracts the Best & Brightest of Its High School Graduates Into Teaching

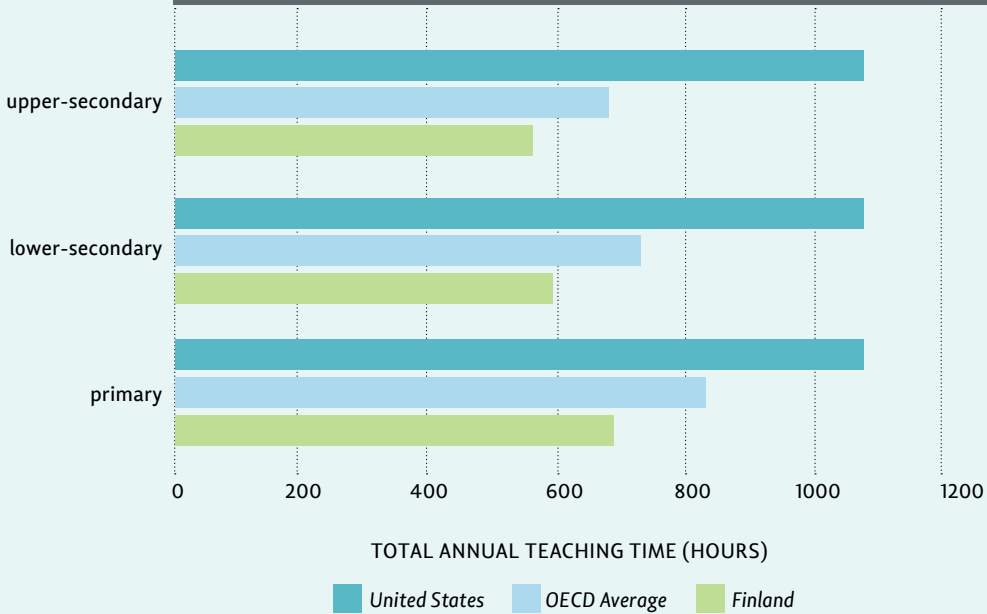
Requiring an advanced degree for teachers was not the only change in teacher preparation that Finland made. It restricted the number of colleges that could offer teacher training to well-regarded universities with respected research programs. More important, it made entrance into teacher training programs competitive with numbers corresponding to supply/demand needs.

Today, only roughly one student is accepted into teacher training for every nine who apply. In 2010, as an example, there were 6,000 applicants competing for only 660 teacher training openings for those aspiring to teach at the primary school level. Consequently, teachers in Finland now come from the top academic 20% of Finland's high school graduates.

It should be noted that a factor contributing to this increase in quality is the salary paid to Finnish teachers. Teacher salaries are benchmarked to other professions. Also contributing to the popularity of teaching careers are working conditions. Finnish teachers are treated like professionals. One of the starkest contrasts between teaching in Finland and teaching in the United States is the number of hours of student contact time (i.e. time spent teaching). As the chart below illustrates, the average US teacher has nearly twice the teaching load as does a Finnish teacher. That means that teachers in Finland have time for planning, time for working with colleagues, and time to grade papers during the work day, not at home in the evening.

Source: Sahlberg (2011b).

AVERAGE NET TEACHING HOURS PER SCHOOL YEAR IN FINLAND, THE UNITED STATES AND IN OECD COUNTRIES



3

LESSON THREE:

The Move to Build the Capacity of Teachers Was Accompanied By a Decision to Raise Expectations for All Students

Finland policymakers made another decision that led to the strong education foundation which the country now enjoys. They determined that all students would be expected to meet rigorous educational standards in their first nine years of education. That decision resulted in what is now called the “comprehensive” foundation of Finland’s educational system. Tracking of students in grades 1-9 came to an end. Instead, all students were expected to meet the same standards.

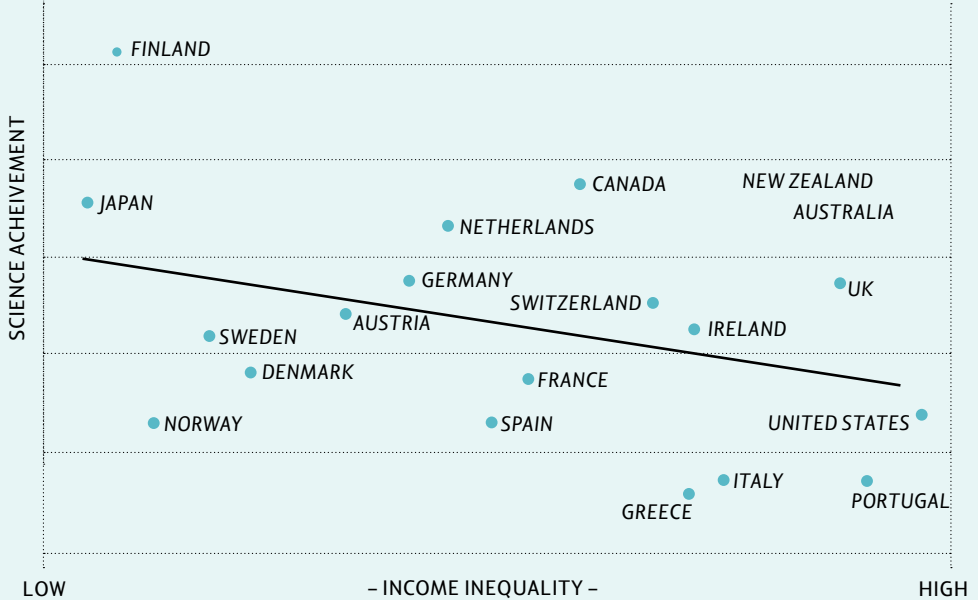
This decision was not politically popular and was widely debated until the first international comparisons of students were released in the early nineties. When these scores were released Finland had moved from middle of the pack to a worldwide leader and the debate about asking more of all students came to an abrupt end.

It is important to note that while expectations for all students are high, Finland not only is a world leader in student performance, it has one of the world’s narrowest performance gaps between low and high-income students. It also has one of the narrowest performance gaps between schools in rural, less prosperous areas and those in more affluent areas.

The chart below dramatically illustrates Finland’s success in providing a sound education to all students, regardless of income. The chart calculates the gap in student performance on science between the wealthiest and poorest quintile in each country.

Source: OECD (2007) and UNDP (2007)

INCOME INEQUALITY AND STUDENT LEARNING IN SCIENCE (PISA) IN SELECTED DEVELOPED COUNTRIES IN 2006



4

LESSON FOUR:

“Prevention,” Not “Intervention” Is a Hallmark of Finnish Education

As noted earlier, Finland’s system of early education goes far beyond anything offered by states in the United States. As important as offering access to early education, however, is Finland’s prevention philosophy. In business terms, it “front loads” special education, or special assistance to students needing help in a wide range of needs – eyesight, language impairment, etc.

The country’s early education program begins for students at 8 months of age. It continues through age 5. The program is run by the nation’s health ministry and focuses not on education but on overall well being. The staffing level reflects the focus of the program. For each 12 students from eight months of age through age 3, there is one full-time teacher and two full-time nurses. From age 3 through 5 there are one full-time teacher and two full-time nurses for 20 students.

At ages 2 and 5 there are formal meetings with parents at which the early-education staff diagnose potential health/welfare/education problems (i.e., hearing, speech defects, learning disabilities, etc.) and outline remedial steps.

For children age 6 there is a year of “pre-school” similar to what youngsters have in the United States with one major exception – there are no formal lessons on letters or numbers. Instead, the focus is on working in groups, learning to learn and group projects.

Are students learning throughout the early education years? Of course. There is a premium on reading to students. Given the staffing ratio there is a gain in language acquisition. In both the early education day care centers and in the preschool year there are learning projects that have students learning to work individually and in groups.

Most of all there is diagnosis. The trained professionals are keen to determine health and learning disabilities that may interfere or slow learning in later years.

As a result, when Finnish students begin formal schooling at age 7, by US standards, a high proportion of them are considered to be in need of “special education” assistance. However, because of early detection, the numbers will decrease overtime – the opposite of what occurs in US schools where detection comes later and intervention/prevention steps increase over time and at a much higher rate.

5

LESSON FIVE:

Prevention/Support Doesn’t End in Early Education

The staffing ratios and the focus on overall health/mental/educational well being don’t end in Finland’s early education programs. The North Carolina delegation, for instance, visited a high school of less than 500 students which had a full-time psychologist, a full-time counselor, a full-time social worker and a full-time nurse. In North Carolina such a school would have had, at best, a full-time counselor and a visiting nurse.

Lower secondary students in Finland (the equivalent of middle school students in North Carolina) are guaranteed by policy two hours of counseling per week – most graduates of US high schools would consider themselves lucky to have had two hours of counseling through their twelve years of schooling.

As a result, students in Finland are making very informed choices about their schooling – critical decisions as the next lesson will explain.

6

LESSON SIX:

Finnish High Schools are Separated into Two Tracks: Academic & Occupational/Technical

Finland, like almost all industrial countries except the United States, separates high schools (in Finland it is “upper secondary school”) into two tracks – academic for those planning on attending college and occupational/technical for those preparing for the world of work.

After completing the first nine years of education, students in Finland can leave school at 16 (similar to the drop out age for North Carolina). However, few do. Over 90% opt to continue. The difference, however, is that they can pursue academic study preparing them for college or move into occupational/technical training preparing them for real careers.

This pattern is true in all of the Scandinavian countries and most of Europe. It is also true in Pacific Rim countries from Japan to Singapore. Not coincidentally, Finland’s dropout rate for students is very low – 93% complete either academic or occupational/technical high schools.

7

LESSON SEVEN:

Education in Finland Reflects the Country’s Economic Aspirations

The separation of high school into academic and occupational/technical is not happenstance. When policymakers decided in the 1970s to dramatically upgrade the quality of Finland’s educational system, it was not simply for altruistic reasons – it was central to the country’s economic aspirations to move up from a relatively poor agricultural economy.

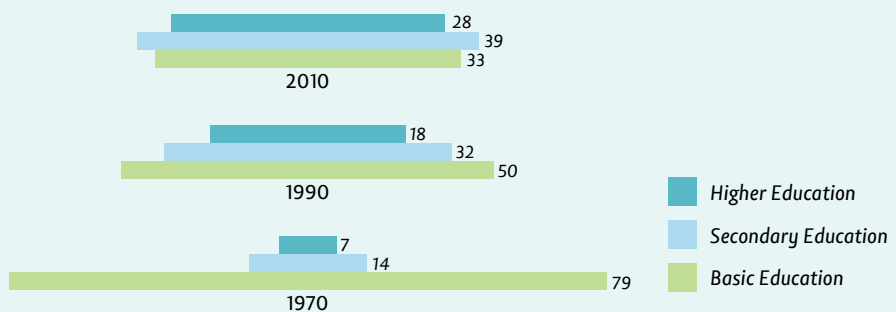
It was not by chance that Finland transformed its economy from agriculture-based to now being one of the most competitive countries in the world for attracting business. By building its educational foundation and gearing its occupational/technical high schools to jobs of the future, Finland positioned itself as a competitor.

The array of choices offered to students entering high school might also account for Finland’s high graduation rate. In 2008 the OECD found that Finland had a graduation rate of 93% compared to 76% in Canada and 77% in the United States.

The chart below illustrates the increase in education attainment levels since Finland began its focus on building a world class system of education in the 1970s. The number of Finns who have only completed basic education has shrunk dramatically while the number of college graduates has quadrupled.

Source: Statistics Finland (n.d.a.)

LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG THE FINNISH ADULT POPULATION SINCE 1970



8

LESSON EIGHT:

Finland Uses Tests for Teaching/Diagnosis, Not for Keeping Score

One of the major differences between North Carolina (and, for that matter, the US) and Finland, is in the country's use of testing and assessment. Finland does not have end-of-year or end-of-grade tests. It does not release scores that rank school systems and school buildings.

The only tests that are announced to the public are the tests that high school seniors take – the United States equivalent of SAT tests, in Finland called “matriculation” tests that are used to determine college admission.

That does not mean that testing doesn't occur in Finland. Within classrooms tests are used often, but they are used for diagnostic purposes – to pinpoint learning deficiencies of young people and provide a teaching guide for teachers. One of the primary focuses of teacher preparation programs in college is on how to use frequent assessments as diagnostic tools is to help teachers individualize student learning.

Testing in Finland, therefore, is a tool. In the US, testing is used for score keeping. It has become a way to rank schools. It is used for merit pay for teachers.

Finnish teachers are not forced to shove out subjects not tested (i.e., foreign language, music, art, geography, etc.) to put more time on “basics.” As a result most Finnish students will graduate from high school fluent in three languages. There is a premium on studying geography and other cultures. Testing is a tool, not a way to keep score.

9

LESSON NINE:

Finland Prides Itself on Trusting

Finland's approach to testing is perhaps its greatest testimony to the trust in which it holds its educators. In stark contrast to the United States, the Finns presume that their well-prepared teachers are doing their jobs. Unlike that, the United States use of tests reflects a suspicion that educators are not doing their jobs – and, unfortunately, that is often found to be the case.

Finland invested in building a high-capacity teaching workforce. Good teachers are found in urban and rural areas and the country has one of the smallest learning gaps between low-income and high-income young people.

As a result, educational policies are largely left to educators. The North Carolina delegation met with elected officials from five of Finland's more-than-eight political parties and found it remarkable that none of them had major differences on education. Differences they had – on economic policies, on plans to shore up the economies of other members of the European Union and especially on immigration policies – but on education they agreed. Subsequently, Finland's educational policies are largely in the hands of those they trust – the educators – and the country is now a world leader.

10

LESSON TEN:

There Was No Silver Bullet

Finland's journey to being a top performer did not happen overnight. The decision in 1973 to build a well-prepared teacher work force was perhaps the first important step. But since 1973 the country shifted to a similar, rigorous first nine years of education for all children that doesn't differentiate between academically gifted and slow learners. They built what might be the world's most comprehensive early education and early diagnosis preschool program. It took almost 40 years for Finland to emerge from educational obscurity to being one of the world's most respected educational systems.





LAST THOUGHTS...

The approaches and philosophy that drive Finland's educational system are so starkly different from those that drive education in the United States that this examination of schooling in another country is perhaps the most thought-provoking of any previous study undertaken by the Center and the Forum.

For some, Finland's success can be dismissed as merely what a relatively homogenous country with a low poverty rate should be expected to do. That dismissal, however, would be erroneous on two levels. First, Finland is succeeding with its small minority and low-income population using the same approaches used in all of its schools. Second, Finland is an example of how a nation can use social and educational policies to lessen income and opportunity gaps between its people. One must remember that as recently as the 1950s Finland was a relatively poor agrarian nation that was not being studied by researchers across the world wanting to understand its success. A set of social policies aimed at keeping the gap between "haves" and "have nots" as low as possible all played a role in their emergence as one of the world's top performing educational countries. Does a gap continue? Yes, but it is far narrower than that which exists in other industrialized countries, including the United States.

In that regard, Finland and Singapore (another of the world's top educational performers) have much in common. Both countries are relatively young. Finland's independence came in 1917, less than 100 years ago. Singapore is much younger. Its nationhood didn't begin until 1947. Both began making great progress in the fifties, thanks in large part to a combination of social and educational policy initiatives that had as a vision giving their people a quality of life equal to any in the world.

Both placed a high premium on attracting their best and brightest into education, and both invested heavily in teacher preparation programs that are considered among the best in the world. Both use occupational/technical training programs as an economic development tool that enables them to be competitive with any nation in the world.

Both had the vision and the will to realize that there is no such thing as a shortcut to educational success. The central components of their vision are interconnected. Attracting highly qualified teachers; investing in their training; making teaching a respected and well-paid profession; establishing high-quality pre-school programs; teaching for learning, not test scores; having an array of options available to high school students; and framing educational goals in the context of building a strong economy – the pieces are all connected; there is no such thing as a single silver bullet to educational success.

And both felt urgency about the need to focus on education. It is worth noting the countries that are now the world's leaders in education – Finland, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, China (Shanghai), all have one thing in common – they were either resource-poor, or emerging from devastating wars or attempting to move from third world to first world economies. There was urgency. They saw education as the foundation to progress. Much of today's commentary on the U.S. economy comes back to the question of whether our country has become too "fat and happy," too complacent. Complacency is missing in the world's top educational countries.

In the end, it comes down to two things – a comprehensive, long-term vision for education and the will to stay the course. Unfortunately, both are currently lacking in the United States. At the national level the No Child Left Behind program is singularly focused on bringing all students up to a low level of proficiency. There is little, if any, vision beyond that, and the consequences of high stakes testing have led to the disappearance in U.S. elementary schools of studies of foreign languages, art, music, geography and other subjects that are not tested. Worse, recent studies find that gains in proficiency rates have been, at best, modest. At the state level, North Carolina has a long history of stops and starts in education. New initiatives come and go as the state's economy rises and falls.

It is clear that creating a world class system of education requires vision and political will. The question for North Carolina and the United States is whether both can be found or will educational performance continue to lag as other countries build stronger and stronger systems of education?

> A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

When we first visited Japan in 1995, none of us envisioned what would become the “Lessons Learned” series of studies. Eleven trips later it has been a remarkable opportunity for North Carolinians to visit and see what other countries are doing in the field of education.

For myself, I jokingly describe this opportunity as the closest thing to “staff development” that I have had in my forty-plus years in education. But it has been more than that. It has been an eye-opener into other cultures, how we as Americans are viewed, what we are going to face in the years ahead.

Most of all it is sobering. When we began this series the United States was still among the world’s top performers. We no longer enjoy that status – not because we are getting worse but because the rest of the world has caught up and surpassed us. Many of the countries we have visited had mediocre school systems only twenty or thirty years ago, but today they are among the world’s best.

Why? They made very strategic long-term investments that are now paying off. Unfortunately, their investments are those that we in the United States have yet to make. Top among them is aspiring to have highly-qualified teachers and school administrators. While states in the United States have lowered teacher standards, other countries have raised them and are now reaping the benefits.

As importantly, most economically emerging countries see education as the foundation to a strong economy. Their focus on rigorous technical and occupational high schools has given them a workforce that is ready to assume the jobs for tomorrow. On the other hand, we continue to contend with unforgivably high school dropout rates and millions of ill-prepared and frequently unemployed citizens.

My hope for this “Learning from” series of publications is that we indeed learn from it. We are facing decline and education is a major reason why. While we basked in being one of the best, other countries found the political will to become better and we are now faced with, what in athletic terms, would be called “catch-up ball.” And catch-up we must.

John Dornan

> ITINERARY

Learning from Finland September 24 – October 2, 2011

FRI, SEPT 23	Depart North Carolina for Helsinki
SAT, SEPT 24	Arrive in Helsinki Dinner presentation: Dr. Pasi Sahlberg, Executive Director, CIMO and author of <i>Finnish Lessons: What the World Can Learn from Educational Change in Finland</i>
SUN, SEPT 25	Guided orientation to Helsinki Group dinner
MON, SEPT 26	Visit to and briefings at Finnish National Board of Education Visit to and briefing at Trade Union of Education in Finland
TUES, SEPT 27	Visit to and briefing at Viikki Teacher Training School Site visit, orientation, and lab visits at LUMA Centre for science and math Briefing at the Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki
WED, SEPT 28	School visits in small groups: Vesala Comprehensive School Upper Stage Kallio Comprehensive School, Lower Stage Töölö Special Upper Secondary School Visit to and briefing at the Ministry of Education and Culture Debriefing Session Group dinner with SAS executives based in Finland
THURS, SEPT 29	School visits in small groups: Itäkeskus Upper Secondary School Alppila Upper Secondary School Ruoholahti Comprehensive School Visit to and briefing at HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences Tour of Pasila Campus
FRI, SEPT 30	Meetings in small groups with Members of Parliament Mika Niikko (True Finns) Inkeri Kerola (Centre Party) Tuula Peltonen (Social Democratic Party of Finland) Satu Haapanen (Green League) Tour of Finnish Parliament House Debriefing Session Group dinner
SAT, OCT 1	Optional cultural visits
SUN, OCT 2	Depart Finland for return to North Carolina

> FINLAND DELEGATION



First Row, left to right: Valerie Brown-Schild; Jo Ann Norris, Ann Goodnight, Sen. Gladys Robinson, Mary Dean Barringer, Rep. Rosa Gill, Joyce Pate, Sen. Louis Pate, Hope Williams, Helen "Sunny" Ladd, Meredith Henderson, Sally Burris, Richard Thompson, Jayne Fleener, Tony Habit, Stephanie Caplan, John Tate

Second Row, left to right: Rep. Hugh Blackwell, John Burris, Alisa Chapman, John Dornan, Pat Orange, Shirley Prince, Glenn Kleiman, Ted Fiske, Bill Harrison, Rep. Tim Moore, Sen. Bob Atwater, Peggy Thompson, Caroline McCullen, Rep. Phil Haire

> FINLAND RESOURCES

RESOURCE PEOPLE IN NC

Dr. John Stephens, Director
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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Dr. Risto Raivio
Center for European Studies
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Ms. Marika Suominen-Yeh
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Finnish exchange student
North Carolina State University

Jaana Korhonen
Finnish exchange student
North Carolina State University

RESOURCE PEOPLE IN HELSINKI

Presenters

Dr. Pasi Sahlberg
Director General,
Centre for International
Mobility and Cooperation

Dr. Kristiina Volmari
Head of International Relations
Finnish National Board of Education

Mr. Leo Pähkin
Counsellor of Education
Finnish National Board of Education

Ms. Ritva Semi
Special Advisor
Trade Union of Education in Finland

Mr. Lauri Vihma
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Dr. Jari Lavonen
Head, Teacher Training Department
University of Helsinki

Mr. Matti Suutala
Country Manager
SAS Institute Oy

Mr. Mikael Hagstrom
Executive Vice President, EMEA and AP
SAS Institute Inc.

Ms. Jaana Palojärvi
Director for International Relations
Ministry of Education and Culture

Mrs. Paula Kinnunen
Vice-President for Education
HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences

Mrs. Marja-Riitta Eriksson
Director of Degree Programme in International Business
HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences

Members of Parliament

Ms. Inkeri Kerola , Parliament of Finland
Ms. Satu Haapanen, Parliament of Finland
Ms. Tuula Peltonen, Parliament of Finland
Mr. Mika Niikko, Parliament of Finland

Faculty, staff and students of the following schools and institutes of higher education

Viikki Teacher Training School
Vesala Comprehensive School Upper Stage
Kallio Comprehensive School Lower Stage
Töölö Special Upper Secondary School
Itäkeskus Upper Secondary School
Alppipila Upper Secondary School
Ruoholahti Comprehensive School, Lower Stage
University of Helsinki

Management and employees at the following companies

Viestintätoimisto Conexio Oy/ Conexio Public Relations
SAS Institute Oy
Helsinki City Education Department
Embassy of the United States of America

Study Coordinators

Meredith Henderson & Stephanie Caplan,
Center for International Understanding
Jo Ann Norris & John Dornan, NC Public School Forum

Photography

Photos courtesy of members of the North Carolina delegation

Author of "Learning from Finland"

John Dornan

BACKGROUND READING / RESEARCH / RESOURCES

"Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from the Educational Change in Finland," Pasi Sahlberg

"The Flat World and Education," Linda Darla-Hammond

"A+ for Finland," Smithsonian Magazine, September 2011

A variety of documents available on the Finland Ministry of Education's website

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

A FINAL NOTE OF APPRECIATION TO THE SPONSORS OF THE "LEARNING FROM SERIES"

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