

Lessons Learned from Finland

Presented by:

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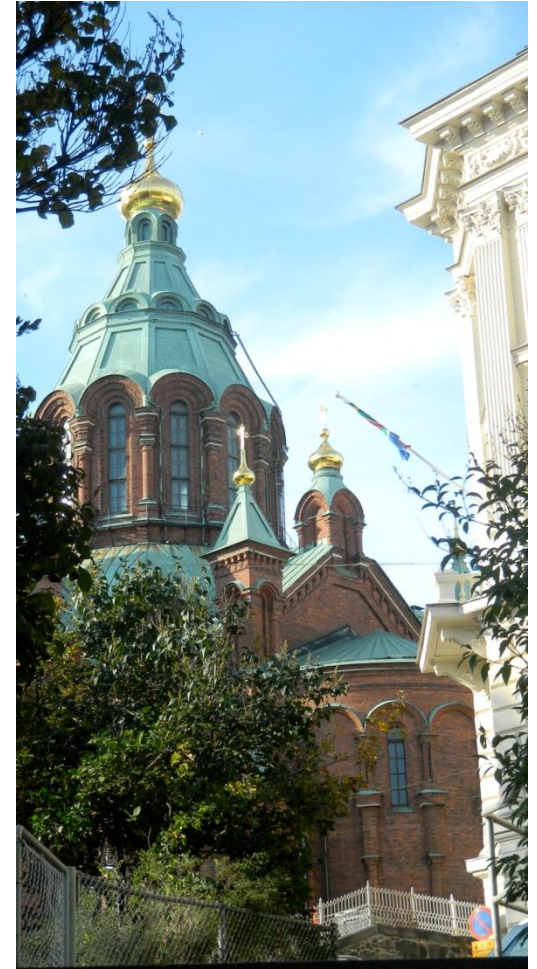
President / Executive Director

Public School Forum of NC

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Countries Studied in the “Learning From” Series:

- China
- Denmark
- Finland
- Great Britain
- India
- Ireland
- Japan
- The Netherlands
- Singapore
- South Korea



Motivation/Goals for the “Learning From” Series...

To see what educationally high-performing countries are doing and to bring home best practices that could be adapted to North Carolina’s educational system.

Originally, the goal was to examine best practices; in recent years, the goal was expanded to see how education has been a part of some countries becoming economic leaders.

Finland's educational system is more different from that in the United States than any yet studied.

Consider these differences:

- Finland has daycare program beginning for children as young as 8 months old and continuing to age 6.
- 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.

Differences between Finland and North Carolina (and the U.S.) Continued...

- At age 6 a voluntary pre-school year is offered.
- Neither the day care nor the preschool 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.

Differences between Finland and North Carolina (and the U.S.) Continued...

- 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.

Differences between Finland and North Carolina (and the U.S.) Continued...

- 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) and Polytechnic Schools (there are 30).
- Tuition, room and board for college are subsidized by the government.



TEN LESSONS LEARNED FROM FINLAND...

Lesson 1: High Performance Begins with Teachers

- 1973...all elementary and secondary teachers required to earn Masters Degrees.
- Degree programs are rigorous blend of research and practical experience.
- The quality of teachers in rural and low income areas of Finland no different from that of its cities.



Lesson 2: Finland Attracts Best & Brightest High School Graduates into Teaching (like Teaching Fellows)

- 6,000 applicants for 660 teacher training openings.
- Teacher candidates are selected; they do not self select.
- Salaries benchmarked to other professions and teachers treated as professionals; have time for planning, working with colleagues, and time to grade papers at school.

Lesson 3: The Move to Build the Capacity of Teachers was Accompanied by a Decision to Raise Expectations for all Students...

- All students expected to meet rigorous educational standards in first nine years of education.
- All students required to get “comprehensive” foundation; tracking of students ended.
- Has one of world’s narrowest performance gaps between low and high-income students.



Lesson 4: “Prevention”, not “Intervention” Hallmark of Finnish Education

- Finland frontloads special education formal meetings with parents when child is 2 and 5 years old; special attention to hearing, speech defects, learning disabilities; remedial steps prescribed.
- Every child gets special assistance where needed, when needed.
- Early diagnosis brings focus on health and learning disabilities that may interfere or slow learning in later years.

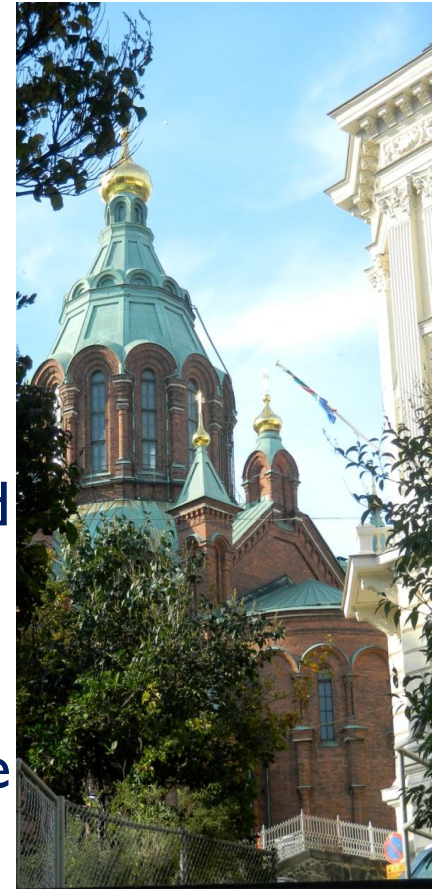


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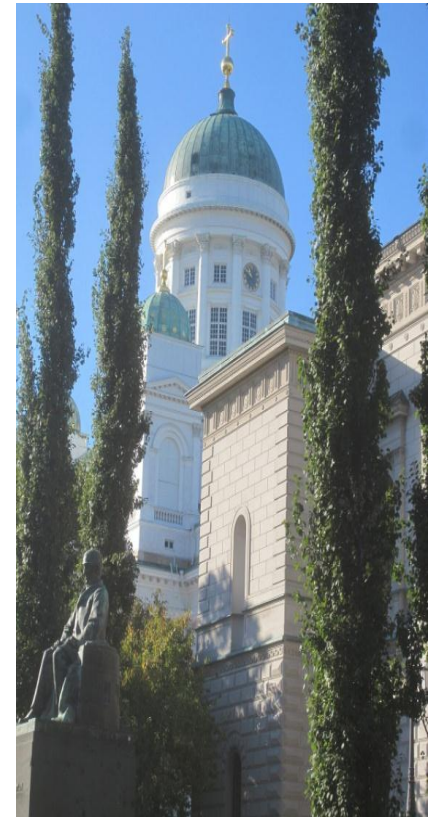
Lesson 5: Prevention/Support doesn't end in Early Education

- Staffing ratios and focus on overall health/mental educational well-being continue throughout middle school into high school.
- Two hours of counseling per week required in middle school.
- Due to extensive counseling, students make informed choices about further schooling.



Lesson 6: Finnish High Schools are Separated into Two Tracks: Academic & Occupational/Technical

- “Upper secondary school” (our high school) is separated into two tracks – academic for those planning on attending college and occupational / technical for those preparing for the world of work.
- Over 90% of Finnish students continue after they turn 16; they either pursue academic study preparing them for college or move into occupational / technical training preparing them for real careers.
- Finland’s dropout rate is very low – 93% complete either academic or occupational / technical high schools.



Lesson 7: Education in Finland Reflects the Country's Economic Aspirations

- By building its educational foundation and gearing its occupational/technical high schools to jobs of the future, Finland positioned itself as a competitor.
- Finland's increase in education attainment levels began to grow in the 1970s when the country began to focus on building a world class system of education.
- The array of choices offered to students entering high school most likely account for Finland's high graduation rate.
- In 2008 Finland had a graduation rate of 93%; compared to 76% in Canada and 77% in the US.

Lesson 8: Finland uses Tests for Teaching / Diagnosis, not Keeping Score

- Finland does not have end-of-year or end-of-grade tests.
- Finland does not release scores that rank school systems and school buildings.
- Matriculation tests are used to determine college admissions and are the only tests announced to the public.
- Classroom tests are used by the teacher for diagnostic purposes.
- Certain subjects not “forced out” because they are not tested; students all take foreign languages, music, art geography and other cultures.

Lesson 9: Finland Prides Itself on Trusting

- The Finns presume that their well-prepared teachers are doing their jobs.
- Educational policies are left largely to educators.
- Little disagreement among the numerous political parties about education issues.
- The Union is strong but does not participate in political activity ...it is union leaders' job to work with whichever party is elected.



Lesson 10: There was no Silver Bullet

- High standing in educational performance took many years.
- 1973 decision for higher standards for teachers the first step toward.
- Similar, rigorous first nine years of education for ALL children; does not differentiate between academically gifted and slow learners.
- Have the world's most comprehensive early education and early diagnosis preschool program.



The Basic Elements of High Performing Countries

- Intertwined Educational & Economic Development Planning
- Concerted Drive to Build a High-Quality Educational Workforce
- Curriculums Focused on Application (ie. using/doing)
- Commitment to Educating All
- Valuing Occupational/Technical Education
- Staying the Course



Learning from Finland...

