

Empower Our Teachers

If you want a world-class education system,
then empower our teachers

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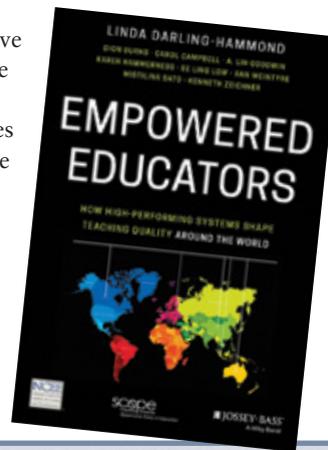
In Singapore, they are called nation builders. In Finland, they are revered as highly respected professionals. In Canada and Australia, they are paid on par with accountants and engineers. In countries on every continent, teachers are so essential to the economic, political and social well-being of their nations, that leaders have built entire systems to foster their recruitment, development, retention and advancement.

In the United States, we have stumbled down a different path. In most states, we have allowed teachers' compensation to fall well behind that of peer professions. In the face of the resulting teacher shortages, standards for becoming a teacher have been lowered or even waived. We have focused on getting rid of weak teachers rather than building our supply of great ones.

The fallout is all around us: Applications to schools of education have plummeted by 35 percent, teacher shortages exist in every state. Turnover is high, especially in our most disadvantaged communities. Many of our best teachers — weary of this treatment — are retiring early. As a result, more than 100,000 classrooms were staffed this fall by individuals who were unqualified for their jobs.

Will we continue on our current path of steadily weakening the only resource that can turn our schools around — our teachers — or will we join the ranks of the world's top-performing education systems and

do what it takes to give our schools one of the finest teaching forces in the world? As states across the nation have now submitted their plans for addressing educational equity and quality under the Every Student Succeeds Act, this is a critical question.



There is no mystery about what needs to be done. We have recently released “Empowered Educators,” a massive study of teaching quality in the world’s high-performing education systems. This global body of evidence shows that in order to deliver the quality of education our children will need in

KEY TAKEAWAYS: Elevating the Status of Teaching

This summer, the National Center on Education and the Economy released its report “Empowered Educators: How High-Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World.” The report examined countries that have successfully redesigned their education system for higher performance and greater equity. Here are some key takeaways from the report on strategies to elevate the teaching profession.

- Countries that have successfully elevated the teaching profession have developed complementary and aligned policies to enhance the status of teaching in society and make it a more desirable profession.
- These policies take the form of not only higher pay, but also in the form of financial support for the cost of initial teacher education.
- Schools in these systems are adequately and equitably funded so that teaching work is well-supported. In addition, a common curriculum system supports teacher planning and instruction, and performance-based assessments involve teachers in developing and scoring thoughtful assessments of learning that can guide teaching toward 21st century skills.
- High-performing systems celebrate the profession of teachers and the professionals who teach in their schools through public recognition and awards initiatives as well as public communication campaigns to elevate the profession generally.

Read the full report at ncee.org/Empowered-Educators.



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tomorrow's world, we must forge a new commitment to the teaching profession focused on building effective systems to support educators and their work.

First, the recruitment of prospective teachers must be intentional and systematic. Leaders in high-performing systems recruit academically capable students into teacher education who also possess a passion for teaching and an ability to connect with young people. Teacher education programs are designed to instill a mastery of both subject matter and the craft of teaching. Student-teachers are trained as researchers as well as clinicians, building their capacity for inquiry and reflection so that they can more effectively address student needs and drive improvement in their schools.

In these systems, initial teacher preparation — increasingly at the master's degree level — is heavily or completely subsidized and is required of all entrants, so no one enters the profession without strong training. Schools of education provide substantial practice teaching in special partner schools under the supervision of first-class, experienced teachers, who often have faculty status in the university as well as the school.

Teachers are not simply aban-

doned on their first day of work, to sink or swim, like many in the U.S. These systems support their professionals by providing intensive induction and mentoring for new teachers and ensuring all of them (and their students) have access to high-quality curricula and instructional supports, not just those in high-income communities. All teachers have robust, collaborative professional development opportunities that are job-embedded and teacher-led.

These are typically aligned to an appraisal and career progression system built on clear and high standards of professional practice, designed to reward excellence and foster equity rather than sanction struggling teachers. These career ladders and pathways support equity and the sharing of expertise, as the best teachers are encouraged and incentivized to work in more challenged schools, mentor new and struggling colleagues and work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning beyond their individual classrooms. As a result, teacher attrition is low and effectiveness is high.

Juxtaposed with the U.S., the contrast is alarming, even dispiriting. In many states, teachers are treated as disposables and shortages have been met by reducing standards rather

than increasing supports. However, a handful of states, like Iowa and Massachusetts, are taking purposeful strides. These states are offering competitive salaries coupled with high standards for entry and preparation, expert mentoring for novices, plentiful professional learning in collegial schools led by principals prepared to support teaching, and opportunities to advance in the profession and share expertise.

No country built a strong teaching profession in an instant. Elevating the profession of teaching is more than anything a matter of choice. The question is: How many U.S. states will make that choice to strengthen and support our nation builders? ■

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