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## Reports: Teacher PD Drives School Growth, and Other Countries Offer Models

By [Ross Brenneman](#) on January 19, 2016 9:15 AM

Washington

A **new pair of reports** uses international comparisons to show how any accountability system that fails to take professional development into consideration might be fighting a losing battle.

The studies, funded by the National Center on Education and the Economy, were led by researchers Ben Jensen and Minxuan Zhang. Both researchers presented on their work at a forum held here Thursday, and both reports boil down to a single point: School accountability needs to factor in the quality of teacher professional development.

"School improvement equals professional learning," Jensen said.

The Jensen-led report, produced by Australia-based think tank Learning First, looked at the PD systems in British Columbia, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore, four high-performing systems. (High performance is measured by student achievement on PISA exams.) Zhang, a professor at Shanghai University and director of its Institute of International Comparative Education, focused exclusively on Shanghai.

The reports offer a lot to digest, but they examine some of the commonalities between high-performing systems: Career ladders, strong teacher induction, and consistent, quality, teacher-led PD.

"For all of these people, professional learning is central to their jobs. It is not an add-on. It is not something done on Friday afternoons or on a few days at the end of the school year," the Jensen report states.

The career ladders are used to ensure that more-experienced teachers help guide and develop younger teachers. In Shanghai, for example, a mentoring teacher is held accountable "for how well he or she mentors a new teacher, the teaching practices of the new teacher, and the performance of the new teacher's students. If these indicators are not improved, the mentor will miss out on promotion," the Jensen report notes. That accountability runs throughout the system, including principals and other administrators.

In addition, Zhang said, China makes sure to layer PD throughout instruction. "Teachers are encouraged to write and reflect so they can figure out why some things work and can share it," he said.

(My colleague Sarah Sparks offers [more details about the Shanghai system](#) here, including a look at how teachers are turned into researchers.)

For the systems to operate effectively, though, it requires letting teachers collaborate to help develop training that works for them.

"This is a profound shift for many systems given the efforts to develop precise school performance measures over the past few years," the Jensen report says. "It requires faith and trust in the people making professional judgments."

**If these systems show promise, why aren't they more prominent in the United States?**

Some states and districts, such as [Iowa](#) and [Baltimore](#), have implemented career-ladder systems, but there hasn't been a widespread diffusion.

One obstacle is time. Teachers in the U.S. spend more time on face-to-face instruction than any other country with the aforementioned system, according to data collected from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):

**Table 4 Teaching Hours Per Week**

Country	Hours Teaching Per Week
U.S.	27 hours
British Columbia	22-23 hours*
Finland	21 hours
U.K. - England	20 hours
Australia	19 hours
Average TALIS	19 hours
Poland	19 hours
Korea	19 hours
Singapore	17 hours

Hong Kong	17 hours**
Shanghai	10-12 hours***

In British Columbia, which only slightly trails the U.S. in face-to-face time, professional learning appears to be worked into every nook and cranny available. One case study from the Jensen report offers a glimpse at an elementary school where the principal acts as the primary substitute teacher so that her faculty could spend time on classroom observation; she also supports teacher-led PD groups.

And what about money? Recent studies have found that the **U.S. actually spends a lot of money** per teacher on professional development, without tracking its effectiveness. Much of that PD, focused on workshops and outside trainings, **may not even be helpful** to the people (teachers) using it.

Viticia Thames, an education consultant at the World Bank, also brought up another major concern: If a system requires that effective teachers help develop other effective teachers, what is the basis for "effectiveness"?

"We haven't really taken the time to develop these objective measures of what quality instruction looks like," Thames said.

There are at least a couple well-known frameworks, the **Classroom Assessment Scoring System** (CLASS) and Charlotte Danielson's **Framework for Teaching**, but any district that wants to create a system from scratch will need to put in a great deal of time and effort, Thames said. "Are we actually going to ask districts across the country to take on that laborious task?"

Panelists brought up other concerns about implementing some of these systems: If every district or state has its own career ladder, doesn't that hamper comparisons? What safeguards are there to ensure that promotion isn't simply the result of favoritism? Are there enough teachers to spare for training and PD?

Marc Tucker, president of the NCEE (and an opinion blogger for *Education Week*) said at the panel that the difficulties the U.S. might face in learning from other countries shouldn't be a roadblock to experimentation.

"There are examples of things that cost less, produce better, and create more equity," Tucker said. "We're damn fools if we don't go and see what they're doing."

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