

**EMPOWERED EDUCATORS**  
**HOW HIGH-PERFORMING SYSTEMS SHAPE TEACHING QUALITY**  
**AROUND THE WORLD**



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**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

Country after country has left the United States in their collective wake as they have redesigned their education systems for much higher performance and greater equity. How did they do it? Among the strategies they pursued, none is more important than the policies they developed to assure a high-quality teacher in front of every student.

*Empowered Educators*, the new international comparative study of teaching quality systems led by Linda Darling-Hammond with funding and support from the National Center on Education and the Economy's Center on International Education Benchmarking, describes what some of the world's top-performing education systems have done to realize that goal. Namely, they have *focused on building effective systems* and made *a commitment to professionalizing teaching* as an occupation central to their education agendas. Four key areas of teacher and teaching policy give shape to this effort to professionalize the occupation:

**Recruitment:**

- Leaders in high-performing systems make recruiting high-achieving students into their teacher education institutions a priority.
- Teachers' salaries are competitive with those in other professions.
- In addition to high-achievement, these systems create rigorous screens to identify candidates with other desired skills, like the ability to conduct research and a strong commitment to the mission of teaching.
- In the United States, there is wide variation between who states and teacher education institutions recruit and how they recruit them. In some states, many teachers come from the lower tiers of college-going students, while others maintain higher standards.
- Most or all of the costs of preparation are covered by government and some pay a stipend to candidates in training, thus everyone can afford high-quality preparation.
- In the United States, candidates must go into debt to prepare for a profession that will pay them at least 20 percent less than what other college graduates with similar education earn.

**Preparation and Induction:**

- In addition to improving the pool of teacher candidates from which they recruit, high-performing systems maintain high standards for admission to schools of education, many by restricting initial teacher education to their research universities.
- These high standards for admission are coupled with requirements that initial teacher education programs instill a mastery of both the subject(s) the individual will teach as well as the actual craft of teaching.

- High performers require strong subject matter knowledge for both elementary and secondary teachers, and some require subject specialization at the elementary level.
- Teachers' subject matter mastery at the elementary level is a crucial determinant of high student achievement not just in elementary school, but also in middle and high school, particularly with the rapid growth of STEM-focused curricula.
- Preparation includes preparing teachers as researchers as well as clinicians, and developing the capacity for inquiry and reflection to enable teachers to better address student needs and continually improve their practice.
- These systems provide extensive induction and apprenticeship for new teachers, either during initial teacher education or at the very beginning of their teaching career, leveraging the expertise of senior teachers for the newest members of the profession.

#### **Professional Work Environments:**

- In combination with the strategies described above, high-performing systems create work environments that reflect and support the professionalism of their teaching forces.
- This takes the form of:
  - Readily and equitably available curriculum materials and instructional supports, as schools are equitably and adequately funded;
  - Ongoing professional support and development, freely available, from a teacher's first day on the job to their last;
  - Time set aside during the work day for collaborative planning, action research, and peer coaching;
  - Appraisal systems, based on clear and high standards of professional practice, designed to improve teaching, rather than simply sanction struggling teachers;
  - Leadership opportunities; and,
  - Career ladders and lattices that support long and rewarding careers in which teachers develop and share their expertise with other teachers.

#### **Elevating the Status of Teaching:**

- Layered on top of the improvement of recruitment and preparation of teachers, are 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—teachers in Singapore, for instance, are paid on par with civil engineers and accountants—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 21<sup>st</sup> 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, *Empowered Educations: How High-Performing Education Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World*, at [www.ncee.org/Empowered-Educators/](http://www.ncee.org/Empowered-Educators/)