

# How Do High-Performing Nations Evaluate Teachers?

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## How Do High-Performing Nations Evaluate Teachers?

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Who decides if a teacher is effective and how is that determination made? School systems across the United States are struggling to answer that question as they try to design and implement teacher evaluation systems that are fair and accurate. It's no easy task and is not limited to public schools in this country. School systems around the world are tackling the same issue and are finding consensus among education stakeholders to be elusive.



Teacher evaluations were the main topic of discussion at the 2013 International Summit on the Teaching Profession (ISTP) Summit held in March in Amsterdam. Now in its third year, the ISTP brought together leaders from teacher unions and education ministries to discuss issues around teacher quality, specifically the criteria used to determine teacher effectiveness and its purpose.

In most nations, teacher evaluation systems are essentially a “work in progress,” says Andreas Schleicher of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Schleicher, who attended the ISTP, is the principal author of the study that was presented at the summit. The report, **Teachers for the 21st Century: Using Evaluations to Improve Teaching**, takes a look at how different nations are tackling this thorny issue (or not tackling it) and identifying specific models that appear to work – that is, have buy-in from key stakeholders and can point to demonstrable results in student achievement. Because consensus is so frustratingly elusive, most nations are treading carefully, although there is widespread acknowledgement that improved evaluation systems have to be on the menu of education policy reforms.

Of the 28 countries surveyed in the OECD report, 22 have formal policy frameworks in place at the national level to regulate teacher evaluations. The six education systems that do not have such frameworks include Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, but teachers in the countries still received professional feedback. In Denmark, for example, teachers receive feedback from their school administrators once a year. In Norway, teacher-appraisal policies are designed and implemented at

the local or school level. In Iceland, evaluation is left to the discretion of individual schools and school boards.

In high-ranking Finland, the national ministry of education plays no role in teacher evaluation. Instead, broad policies are defined in the contract with the teachers' union. Teachers are then typically appraised against the national core curriculum and the school development plan. Finland, of course, is known for having no standardized testing, obviously then making it impossible for it to be used as a tool for teacher evaluation. (**Finland's education system does just fine without it**).

Still, the use of test scores is commonly used as a measure of teacher effectiveness by the nations surveyed by OECD. About 60 percent of teachers said these scores are generally useful.

But none of these nations use them as bluntly as the United States. Blowback against standardized testing has at least forced some districts to revisit evaluations. Within the last two years, more than 20 states have adopted legislation to revise their teacher evaluation systems, and school districts in every state have implemented evaluation reforms. In some states, policymakers have consulted NEA affiliates and worked with them to develop comprehensive evaluation systems based on multiple measures of student achievement and traditional classroom observations.

"If we really want systems that help all students reach their full potential, we must allow educators, parents, students and communities to be a part of the process and have a stronger voice in the conversations around high-quality assessments that really do support student learning," said NEA President Dennis Van Roekel.

Wariness over the misuse of test scores runs throughout the school systems in most nations – an acknowledgment that they cannot provide a complete picture of teaching quality and that multiple sources of evidence are required (many countries include parent and student surveys as well as classroom observations, and peer and principal assessment). In addition, representatives at the ISTP agreed that teacher-appraisal systems must include high-quality professional development, good working conditions, support from administrators, and a prominent role for teachers in designing new policies.

Singapore, another top-performing nation that also generally disavows test scores, emphasizes teacher collaboration in their evaluation systems. Singapore also has a rigorous professional development program which focuses on how to evaluate, mentor, and coach newer educators. Teachers are entitled up to 100 hours of professional development every year and often work in teams—priorities that reflect the country's philosophy that the key to a first rate teacher force is to provide educators with the right incentives.

Delegations at the ISTP agreed that when teacher evaluation systems are developed with the participation of teachers and their unions, they are more likely to win the trust of teachers and provide schools with relevant and valuable information.

Or as Hong Kong Professor Kai-Ming Cheng noted, “successful evaluation will help teachers think about students, and unsuccessful evaluation will make them think about themselves and their career.”

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