

Century-old inner-city schools are sad examples of the decaying infrastructure.



Decaying Infrastructure

Here we are in the twenty-first century, using schools that were built in the nineteenth century. When local governments need to replace these aging buildings, they usually resort to issuing bonds. A **bond** is a certificate of debt issued by a government guaranteeing payment of the original investment plus interest by a specified future date. Bonds give the local communities the money they need to build the schools and fifteen to twenty years to pay off the debt.

But for most schools, repair, not replacement, is the remedy for antiquated buildings. Although rewiring for computer and Internet installation is needed, teachers and principals give higher priority to “adequate” heating, lighting, acoustics, ventilation, and air conditioning. The Department of Education estimates that tens of thousands of schools need major repairs, repairs that range from \$279 billion to \$500 billion.⁴⁹ In a nationwide survey of elementary and secondary public school principals, more than 40 percent reported that poor building conditions were impairing teacher instruction and student learning.⁵⁰

POWERPOINTS 9.10

Environmental Factors Impact the Condition of Schools



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INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY

Know Your School Finance Lingo! Match economic terms with educational definitions.

Commercializing Children and Schools

Many educators and psychologists believe that marketing to the nation’s children, especially in school, has an adverse affect on their health and the quality of their lives. Sophisticated marketing techniques create a thirst for consumption and selfishness that replaces healthy, caring, and creative childhood activities. Although other nations protect their young from marketers, the United States does not.

Governing America’s Schools

School Governance Quiz

The following quiz should help you focus on how schools are governed. If you are stumped by some of these questions, fear not; the remainder of the chapter is organized around a discussion of these questions and their answers.

1. Most school board members are (Choose only one.)
 - a. White, male, and middle or upper class.

TEACHING TIP

Use the School Governance Quiz as a pretest with your class. Poll students’ answers to get a sense of their assumptions and interests.

A Closer Look Who Controls What? Levels of Educational Power

STATE GOVERNMENTS

- Levy taxes
- License teachers and other educators
- Set standards for school attendance, safety, etc.
- Outline minimum curricular and graduation standards (sometimes including specific textbooks to be used and competency tests for student graduation and teacher certification)
- Regulate the nature and size of local school districts

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- Implement state regulations and policies
- Create and implement local policies and practices for effective school administration

- Hire school personnel
- Provide needed funds and build appropriate facilities
- Fix salaries and working conditions
- Translate community needs into educational practice
- Initiate additional curriculum, licensing, or other requirements beyond state requirements
- Create current and long-range plans for the school district

REFLECTION: As a classroom teacher, offer some examples of the issues that would lead you to deal with state government. Which issues would send you down a path to the local government?

POWERPOINTS 9.12

Who Controls What? (State)

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTION

Ask your class if they would consider running for public office. Because their interest (and expertise) is education, would they contemplate a run for the school board? What presumptions affect their willingness or avoidance?

POWERPOINTS 9.13

Who Controls What? (Local)

RAP 3.10

Get on Board

State Influence Grows as School Boards Come under Fire

3. During the past two decades, the influence of local school boards has . . . *decreased*.

Forged in the hamlets of colonial New England, school boards have symbolized small-town democracy. School board meetings evoke the essence of Americana—the kind painted by Norman Rockwell and made into a Frank Capra movie titled *Mr. Deeds Elected to the School Board* (starring Jimmy Stewart as the beleaguered school board president). But Americana aside, many criticize school boards as unresponsive and entrenched bureaucracies.

Part of the problem is that there is little consensus on how school boards should operate.⁵² Most school board members view themselves as *trustee representatives*, selected to serve because of their educational expertise and good judgment. But others, including many voters, see school board members as *delegate representatives*, responsible for implementing the will of the public (or being voted out of office if they do not). The type of elections used to select school board members can shape the kind of school board that will emerge. When school boards are selected through “at-large” elections, in which the entire school district votes for all the members of the school board, the school board is expected to represent the interests of the entire community (trustee representatives). But some school districts choose board members to represent the interests of specific neighborhoods (delegate representation).

District-wide, at-large elections typically result in more elite, politically conservative, and upper-class individuals being elected to school boards. After all, it is the well-established individual who is likely to have the financial resources and educational and business background needed to win a big, district-wide election. Poorer citizens, people of color, and women are less likely to find themselves on at-large school boards. Unfortunately, many citizens feel disenfranchised when it comes to school board elections.

Other criticisms include the following:

- School boards have become *immersed in administrative details*, at the expense of more important and appropriate policy issues. One study of West Virginia school boards showed that only 3 percent of all decisions made concerned policy.
- School boards are *not representing local communities*, but only special interest groups. Elections to the school board receive little public support. In a New York City school board election, for instance, only 7 percent of the voters participated.

- The *politics of local school board elections* have a negative impact on attracting and retaining superintendents and lead to conflict with state education agencies.
- The composition of the boards is *not representative*, with individuals of color, women, the poor, and the young unrepresented or underrepresented.
- School boards have been in the *backseat when it comes to educational change and reform*. As a matter of fact, many school boards do not support current educational reform proposals, and members have lagged behind public opinion on such issues as school choice and charter schools.
- The education of children goes beyond school issues to include health, social, and nutritional concerns. School boards are *too limited in scope* to respond to all the contemporary concerns of children.
- If schools continue to be *financed less from local funds and more from state funds*, local boards could become less influential.
- Many of the new reforms call for *new governance organizations*, site-based management, or choice programs that relegate the school board to a less important, perhaps even unnecessary, role.⁵³

Although these criticisms suggest a dismal future for school boards, preparing their obituary may be premature. School boards have endured a long time and may be around long after many of the reform recommendations are forgotten.

The School Superintendent and Principal

4. Local school district superintendents are . . . *often mediating conflicts, civil service-type administrators, sometimes elected and sometimes powerless figureheads.*

The first superintendents were hired to relieve school boards of their growing administrative obligations. The year was 1837, and these new superintendents worked in Buffalo and Louisville. As the nineteenth century progressed, more communities followed this example. Superintendents were expected to supervise and hire teachers, examine students, and buy supplies, which had become too burdensome for the school boards themselves. Superintendents also kept school records, developed examinations, chose textbooks, and trained teachers.

By the twentieth century, the superintendent's role had changed from the board's administrative employee to its most knowledgeable educational expert—from helper to chief executive officer. Today, the superintendent is the most powerful education officer in the school district, responsible for budgets, buildings, new programs, daily operations, long-term goals, short-term results, and recruiting, hiring, demoting, and firing personnel. When things are going well, the superintendent enjoys great popularity. But when things are going poorly, or school board members are not pleased, or local community groups are angry, or teacher organizations turn militant, or . . . you get the picture. When there is a problem, it is usually the head of the system, the superintendent, who gets fired. The superintendent lives and works in a fish-bowl, trying to please various groups while managing the school district. It is a very insecure existence of sidestepping controversies, pleasing school board members, responding to critics, juggling many different roles and goals, and living with conflict. In many urban school districts, superintendents serve only a few years before they are fired, resign, or retire.⁵⁴ Many believe that this high-visibility, high-stress position is also subject to subtle forms of racism and sexism. About 80 percent of superintendents are male, and more than 90 percent are white.

One need not look hard for the reasons for this turnover. Successful superintendents must win and maintain public support and financing for their schools. This involves forming

CLASS ACTIVITY
Overview and Guest Speaker
 IM, Activity 9.5

TEACHING TIP
 A 2001 candidate for the Los Angeles School Board spent more than \$2 million to win the seat, making it the most costly school board seat in America. The job pays \$24,000 per year. Question for the class: Why do some people feel so driven to serve on a school board?

political coalitions to back their programs and to ward off attacks from those more concerned with rising taxes than with the school budget. In an era in which most citizens in many communities do not have children in schools, this becomes a real test of political acumen. Superintendents find themselves serving on a number of civic committees, speaking to community groups, and being the public relations spokesperson for the school district. Yet, despite feeling high levels of stress, nine out of ten superintendents find their work rewarding and believe they made the right career choice.⁵⁵

School superintendents who survive and thrive are the politically savvy administrators who can “read” their school board. In *The School Managers: Power and Conflict in American Public Education*, Donald McCarty and Charles Ramsey provide a useful classification system that matches school board types with different superintendent styles.⁵⁶

**School Boards in Communities
That Are ...**

Dominated: School boards run by a few local elite who dominate community and school policies

Factional: Divided community, competing factions

Pluralistic: Competition among interest groups

Inert: No visible power structure, little interest in schools

**Prefer Superintendent Style
That Is ...**

Functionary: Follows wishes of the board

Political: Balances often opposing concerns, avoids appearance of favoritism

Adviser: Moves cautiously as adviser among shifting community coalitions

Decision maker: Board relies on superintendent for leadership and decision making

RELATED READING

Who Said School Administration Would Be Fun: Coping with a New Emotional and Social Reality (1998) by Jane L. Sigford

GLOBAL VIEW

Twenty countries originally signed the Convention on the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1960, and since then, fourteen additional countries have joined. Many but not all are among the world's most advanced nations. Only five of these nations have lower high school completion rates than the United States.

POWERPOINT 9.14

Elementary and Secondary Principal Demographics

An effective superintendent must be an effective manager, and a number of new superintendents of large school districts have been selected for their management skills rather than their educational expertise. New York City, San Diego, Seattle, and Los Angeles have chosen generals, lawyers, and a former governor to lead their schools.⁵⁷ Although well-known figures may bring visibility and hope, there is no superman to “fix” the problem. An effective superintendent is a good manager who builds solid relationships and persists at the job for more than a few years.⁵⁸ And good management is essential. Superintendents have been terminated when textbooks or school buses arrive late. In fact, some school districts have adopted performance-based contracts that link superintendent compensation directly to student performance.⁵⁹

While the superintendent is the focal point of district pressures, the principal bears the brunt of school pressure. “Stress, testing, and social problems are all in the schools now: AIDS education, security, parenting classes, language programs. There are so many things that they are responsible for that they might not have control over, and it’s led to concern about principal burnout.”⁶⁰ Even at the elementary level, where many consider the stress most tolerable, a typical elementary principal supervises thirty teachers, fourteen other staff members, 425 students, and works an average of nine or ten or more hours a day, sixty or even seventy hours a week.⁶¹ When budget cuts reduce support staff, they juggle roles as teachers, community liaisons, nurses, athletic directors, crisis managers and budget managers. Amazingly, 20 percent of principals report spending five to ten hours a week in efforts aimed at a single

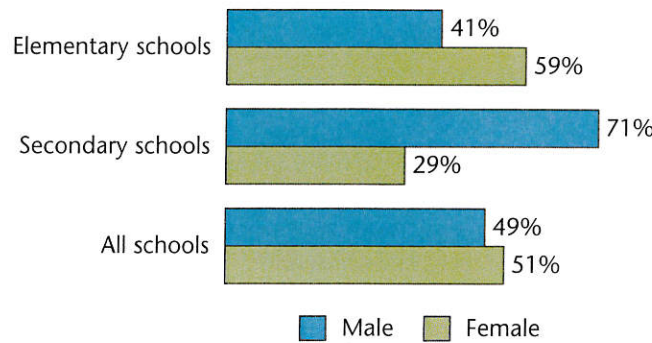
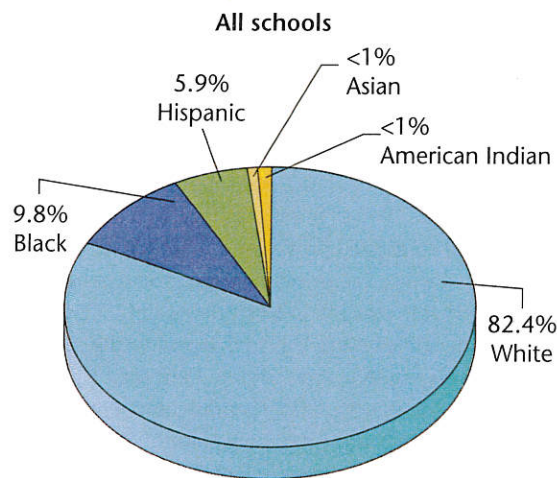


FIGURE 9.7

Elementary and secondary principals.

SOURCE: National Center for Educational Statistics, "Public and Private School Principals by Selected Characteristics," *Condition of Education*, 2011, for latest available data 2007–2008.



REFLECTION: Why are more women principals at elementary rather than secondary schools? What are the potential challenges for schools with white principals and a majority of students of color?

purpose: avoiding lawsuits.⁶² Principal recruiters struggle to overcome persistent racial and ethnic imbalances as well.⁶³ (Figure 9.7 provides insight into principal demographics.) Because of the central role of the school principal, it is not a surprise to learn that their competence is second in importance only to teacher quality in improving schools.⁶⁴

These statistics underscore the tough challenges that superintendents and principals face, and you may be wondering, "Why would anyone want these jobs?" Here's one reason: Talented educational leaders take satisfaction from making a real difference in the lives of thousands of students. If you are considering teaching, then making a positive difference in the lives of the students in your class is a motivator for you. Magnify that and you can see why some are drawn to administration. School districts committed to serious reform know that principals and superintendents can make a difference, and New York City is a case in point. The city established its own Leadership Academy to prepare a new generation of administrators. Once they graduate, these new principals manage schools that have been made smaller to increase their effectiveness. The new principals exert greater authority, control their own budget, and hire their faculty. They also shoulder a greater responsibility for the academic performance of their students and take home a larger paycheck than past administrators. Many of these new principals are only in their 30s. In fact, more than half of New York City's principals are now under 50. Why does the city seek younger (and less experienced) leaders? "I wanted to change the old system," former Schools Chancellor Joel Klein said. "New leadership is a powerful way to do that."⁶⁵

POWERPOINT 9.15

Effective Principals

RELATED READING

If You Don't Feed the Teachers They Eat the Students! (2000) by Neila E. Connors

FOCUS QUESTION 9

What is the “hidden” government of schools?

RELATED READING

Schools That Learn: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents, and Everyone Who Cares About Education (2000) by Peter M. Senge (ed.)

Covert Power in Schools

5. Who might be considered part of the “hidden school government”? . . . *the school secretary and parents.*

So you think that the school principal is the only one responsible for school personnel decisions, including hiring and firing? Think again. Parents, vocal individuals, the school secretary, and community groups have **covert power** and can bring significant pressure to bear on which teachers stay in a school, and which leave. These unofficial but highly involved people and groups constitute the **hidden government** of schools.⁶⁶

The concept of hidden government is not unique to schools. In fact, most of our institutions, including the White House, have developed their own unique forms of hidden government. There, decision making is often influenced more by old colleagues back home (the “kitchen cabinet”) than by the president’s official advisers and cabinet members.

How does hidden government operate in schools? Following are some examples.

Example 1 A first-year teacher in a New England junior high school spent long hours after school preparing lessons and working with his students. Admirable as all this appeared, the school secretary, Ms. Hand, advised the teacher not to work with female students after school hours, because “You may get your fingers burned.” The teacher smiled, ignored the secretary’s advice, and continued providing students with after-school help.

Within a week, the principal called the teacher in for a conference and suggested that the teacher provide extra help to students only if both male and female students were present. The teacher objected to the advice and to the secretary’s complaining to the principal. The principal responded, “You’re new here, and I can understand your concern. But what you have to learn is that Ms. Hand is more than a secretary. She knows this school better than I do. Follow her advice and you’ll do just fine.”

Lesson: You can’t always tell which people hold the real power by their official position.

Lesson: The school secretary is often the eyes and ears of the principal. In some cases, the secretary manages the day-to-day operations of the school.

The school secretary holds a position that can exert significant covert power in his or her pivotal role as the principal’s “eyes and ears”.

Example 2 A young teacher in an elementary school in the Midwest was called into the principal’s office for a conference. The principal evaluated her teaching as above average but suggested that she maintain greater discipline. Her classroom was simply too noisy, and the students’ chairs were too often left in disarray. The conference was over in ten minutes.

The teacher was offended. She did not feel her classroom was too noisy, and the chairs were always arranged in a neat circle. Moreover, the principal had visited her class for only five minutes, and during that time the students had said hardly a word.

The next day, in the teacher’s lounge, all became clear when she discussed the conference with another teacher. The teacher nodded, smiled, and explained:

“Mr. Richards.”

“The custodian?”

“Yup. He slowly sweeps the halls and listens for noisy classrooms. Then he tells the principal. He also hates it when the chairs are in a circle, since it makes sweeping harder. Nice straight rows are much easier. Just make sure your classroom is quiet when he’s in the halls and have



your students put the chairs in neat, straight rows at the end of the day. That's the ticket for getting a good evaluation!"

Lesson: School custodians are often a source of information for principals and of supplies for teachers. They make very helpful allies and powerful adversaries.

Example 3 An elementary school teacher in a rural southern community was put in charge of the class play. Rehearsals were under way when the teacher received a note to stop by the principal's office at 3:00 P.M.

The principal had received a call from a parent who was quite disappointed at the small part her daughter had received in the play. The principal wanted the teacher to consider giving the child a larger part. "After all," he explained, "her mother is influential in the PTA, and her father is one of the town's most successful businessmen. It's silly for you to alienate them. Give her a bigger part. Life will be easier for both of us."

Lesson: Parents can also be influential in school decisions by applying pressure on principals, school boards, and community groups. When you decide to make a stand in the face of parental pressure, choose a significant issue and be able to substantiate your facts.

Business and Schools

6. The influence of the business community in U.S. schools can best be characterized as . . . *extensive and growing.*

Business values have long influenced school practices, and decades ago educators adopted a business vocabulary. *Superintendent*, the title originally given to a factory supervisor, was assigned to the school district leader. Both a factory and a school have been called a *plant*. *Quality control*, *accountability*, *management design*, and *efficiency* were also expropriated. Little surprise that a growing number of superintendents come from the business sector. School values often mirror those of business: hard work, competition, dependability, punctuality, neatness, conformity, and loyalty.⁶⁷ Companies that formalize a relationship with a school, by dedicating personnel or products or signing exclusive rights contracts, are said to have formed an **educational partnership**. A number of educators express concerns about these developments, an issue we explored earlier in this chapter. But whether we are comfortable or uncomfortable with this trend, "the most far-reaching initiative in education to emerge in recent years is the growing corporate interest in public schools."⁶⁸

Making Schools More Responsive

7. In most schools, teachers are expected to . . . *comply with policies made by principals and by district and state officials.*

While parents, community groups, and the business sector carve out their roles in schools, teachers traditionally have been omitted from meaningful involvement in school governance.

Teachers, as a rule, do not participate in hiring new teachers, in developing criteria by which their teaching will be evaluated, in setting graduation requirements, or in scheduling classes. One reason is sheer size: Over the past centuries, schools and school districts have continued to grow. Larger districts are

TEACHING TIP

Have students *think-pair* and *share* similar examples that illuminate the hidden government of schools.

CLASS ACTIVITY

Governance Simulation
IM, Activity 9.6

FOCUS QUESTION 10

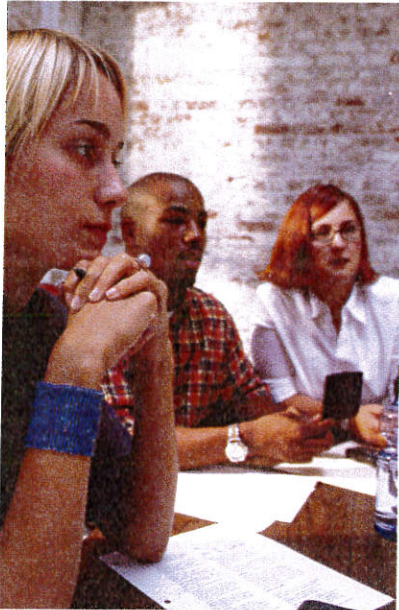
How does the business community influence school culture?

FOCUS QUESTION 11

How are schools being made more responsive to teachers and the community?

Corporate influence in schools can be seen in the emphasis on competition, punctuality, and the growing trend to advertise to children.





Teachers, who know more than most people in the educational chain about the needs and interests of individual students, have often been excluded from school management and policy making.

CLASS ACTIVITY
Governance Role Plays
 IM, Activity 9.7

considered more cost-effective because they lower the per-pupil expenses, from preparing food to building maintenance, and bigger school districts are able to offer more courses, extracurricular activities, and sports programs.⁶⁹ Merging smaller schools and districts into larger ones is called **consolidation**. In 1940, more than 117,000 school districts existed in the United States. Today there are about 14,000.⁷⁰ Larger schools and school districts also mean more red tape, greater student alienation, and reduced parent-teacher involvement; in other words, less responsive schools.⁷¹ Many districts are now reversing the trend, creating smaller schools and smaller districts, a process called **decentralization**, or creating charter schools operating without central office involvement.⁷²

In addition to size, top-down decision making by principals and superintendents also contributes to a sense of teacher powerlessness.⁷³ Efforts to empower teachers include site-based or school-based management and collaborative decision making. **Site-based or school-based management** shifts decision making from the central district office to individual schools, and **collaborative decision making** creates teacher committees to share power between the principal and the faculty. If you find yourself teaching in a school using one or both of these approaches, keep in mind that the results have been mixed. Some teachers enjoy making curricular and budgetary decisions, but others feel such participation simply becomes “just another meeting you’ve got to go to.” To complicate these efforts even further, federally mandated tests have preempted many local decisions.⁷⁴ One of the challenges facing you as a teacher or an administrator will be to create more responsive and humane school climates, both for yourself and your students.

Education in Finland

American students have been struggling on the international stage for decades. While many bemoan the sad state of our test scores, few take the time or make the effort to discover why students in other countries do so much better. For the past decade, for example, 15-year-old Finnish students have consistently tested at or near the top in reading, mathematics, and science. (See Figure 9.8.) Why is Finland doing so well? We will conclude this chapter by taking a brief look at how Finland manages its schools, and see what lessons it may offer us.⁷⁵

In the early 1970s, Finland had much in common with the United States today: an underperforming education system. Their economy was in dire straits, dependent on a quickly disappearing natural resource, lumber. The Finns knew that to compete in the world economy, they would have to make fundamental changes to their schools and rebuild their economy. But unlike our reform efforts (discussed in Chapter 5), Finland did not focus on competition, school choice, merit pay, or standardized testing: Finland focused on teachers. First, teacher education was revamped and turned into a five-year program of study, research, and practice. Finnish teachers were prepared to work with all students with learning disabilities and given more time to study their subject fields; when they completed their preparation, they received a master’s degree. Now they were ready to begin teaching. This high-quality preparation led to a highly honored career: teaching. A career in teaching is now highly selective; nine out of every ten people who apply to become teachers are rejected. People who go into teaching enjoy their careers, and few leave.

Finland has a national curriculum not unlike our current effort to create national core standards. But in Finland, the curriculum is quite general, and teachers are given great autonomy in designing and teaching their own lessons. Unlike the United States, there are no national tests, and no emphasis on test preparation. In fact, most Finnish students take their

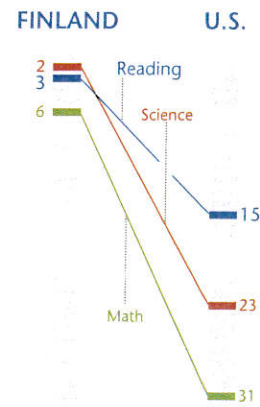


FIGURE 9.8

Rankings on international PISA tests.

SOURCE: Programme for International Student Assessment, 2009 (most current data available).

REFLECTION: What lessons do you take away from how Finland manages its schools, and how its students score on international tests?

POWERPOINTS 9.16

Rankings on international PISA tests

first standardized test when they graduate high school. The few tests given before then are used for school comparisons and are not for public consumption.

Now you have the key clues to Finland's success (as well as Japan's and Singapore's educational success): *trusting teachers*. Parents trust teachers because they are professionals, and teachers trust one another and regularly collaborate to solve mutual problems. Trust is seen every day as teachers work in teams, continually improving their curriculum and each other's teaching. Their motto is "Trust Through Professionalism." The evidence indicates that trust is far more effective in raising test scores than test preparation.

Some might point out that Finland and the United States are too different to make useful comparisons. Certainly, there are differences, and those differences are worth pointing out. For one, Finland is less diverse than the United States, but it is far from a homogenous nation. Fifteen percent of the population speaks a second language, and 45 languages are spoken in Helsinki schools. Another difference favors the United States: we are wealthier. But our willingness to tolerate one out of five Americans living in poverty detracts from school achievement. Less wealthy Finland has a poverty rate of only 3 to 4 percent, but their poor receive more services than the poor here, and poverty is far less crushing. Finland's national policies to mitigate the impact of poverty are evident in school performance: The difference between the highest performing school and the lowest performing school in Finland is less than 4 percent. When one compares Finland to individual U.S. states, comparisons are even easier to make. Finland is the size and population of about thirty-three states, but it outperforms all of them on international tests.

U.S. schools are managed and to some degree financed with an eye to high-stakes testing, competition, and school choice. When Finnish educators view the way we run our schools, they are astonished. The idea of merit pay, teacher competition, and evaluating teachers by students' test scores make no sense to them. The very idea of promoting teacher competition rather than teacher collaboration is alien. Students feel less pressure, have frequent breaks for physical activity during their relatively short school day, and don't begin school until they are 7 years old. Every Finnish child gets a free school meal and a free education—even at the university level.

By focusing on quality teaching rather than testing, Finland regularly attains the highest test scores in the Western world, and its economy is rated among the most innovative, creative, and successful. It is a nation that respects its educators and gives them the autonomy to design and measure each student's education without working under the fearful shadow of testing and competition. We have much to learn from Finland.

TEACHING TIP

Currently, the Finnish model of education is garnering a considerable amount of attention. Have students describe how their schooling would have changed if their schools had adopted the Finnish way of educating students. Do students think their schools would realistically adopt any of the things the Finns do? Why or why not?



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37. **Finding Fairness for Rural Students**, by Marty Strange, *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 2011.
38. **Respect—Where Do We Start?** by Marie-Nathalie Beaudoin, *Educational Leadership*, September 2011.
39. **School Funding's Tragic Flaw**, by Kevin Carey and Marguerite Roza, *Education Sector Reports*, May 15, 2008.
40. **Where Have All the Strong Poets Gone?** by Alan C. Jones, *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 2007.

ANALYZE CASE STUDIES

16. **Kate Sullivan:** A principal faces the problems endemic to the students served by her school, which is located in a very low socioeconomic area. Issues of drugs, poverty, neglect, hunger, and homelessness are compounded by the underfunding for the school.
17. **Jane Vincent:** A teacher is asked by her principal to reconsider her grading of a student whose numerical average for the marking period is just below the department's cutoff score for that grade.

OBSERVE TEACHERS, STUDENTS, AND CLASSROOMS IN ACTION



14. Classroom Observation: School Board Meeting to Discuss and Analyze Application for Jaime Escalante Charter School

As a teacher, you will be affected by decisions made by your local school board. In this observation, you will observe an actual Montgomery County (MD) School Board meeting during which officials struggle with a proposal for the district's first charter school.