



Battelle leads Ohio teams on tours of world's top schools

Battelle for Kids study reveals key drivers of student success

Battelle for Kids

"It isn't just about test scores. It's about grit, perseverance, curiosity, self-control. The one thing that separates extraordinary, from ordinary, isn't the knowing. It's the doing."

— **Jim Mahoney**, executive director, Battelle for Kids

How do the highest-performing school systems across the world consistently achieve impressive results? In spring 2012, teams of Ohio education and business leaders joined Battelle for Kids in a Global Education Study to answer this question by embarking on fact-finding trips to five of the world's 12 highest-performing school systems: Finland; Hong Kong; Long Beach, Calif.; Ontario, Canada; and Singapore.

These systems rank as sustained improvers that have seen more than five consistent rises in student performance based on results of national and international assessments:

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA); National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

The Global Education Study teams interviewed and observed leaders, teachers, students and others to explore how these systems consistently rank at the top in terms of quality, equity and productivity of all children. Although we discovered many differences among these systems, there were six common drivers leading to student success.

Early learning

Early learning and ongoing intervention are important to ensure no children are left behind. High-performing school systems invest in early learning because it contributes to the development of highly skilled, knowledgeable and caring citizens.

While most U.S. educators believe in and value early learning, they may not be fully aware of its impact. Of the U.S. children who drop out of high school, half were behind before entering kindergarten. In fact, 30% to 60% of young children in the United States are not ready to be successful when they begin kindergarten.

"That first golden ticket you can give kids in a school system — an effective use of literacy and numeracy skills — is critically important to their learning down the road," said **Mary Jean Gallagher**, Ontario Ministry of Education assistant deputy minister of education and chief student achievement officer.

Personalization and pathways for student success

In high-performing systems, personalization and pathways



Singapore Ministry of Education official Eugenia Yunchin Tan speaks during a Global Education Summit session in Singapore.

for student success are designed and delivered so that all students secure core competencies and engage in educational programs that are relevant to their personal and career interests.

High-performing countries have a system in which their lowest-performing students are ranked only slightly lower than their best-achieving students — essentially, there is no significant academic achievement gap. This success stems from coherent and accessible pathways for all students, from pre-elementary to postsecondary, from basic education to vocational education and from job training to the workforce.

“No matter which track you start off with, there’s always opportunity to go all the way to university,” said **Eugenia Yunchin Tan**, deputy director-curriculum policy office, Singapore Ministry of Education. “We want them to be a confident person, self-directed learner, an active contributor and a concerned citizen.”

Focus on learning

High-performing systems do not overly rely on test results and performance evaluations to reward or punish educators and schools. Instead, they focus on learning, not assessments.

The schools the Global Education Study teams studied focus considerable time, attention and resources to provide incentives to implement and improve effective feedback and build teachers’ ability to employ formative assessments. This focuses teachers on learning versus testing, preventing teachers from becoming goal-oriented on test results, rather than what’s best for the child.

“In Finland, we hardly do any testing,” said Dr. **Minna Riikka Järvinen**, executive director of the Centre for After School Programs. “The main focus in research is how learning evolves, not in what has been learned.”

Teacher selectivity, quality and growth

Many educators in the U.S. worry about alignment among curriculum, instruction and assessment. But there is another alignment that is even more important: alignment between the quality of the teacher in the classroom and the expectations for success that educators have for students through planned teacher selectivity, quality and growth.

“Every Friday afternoon, we sit together to co-plan lessons, demonstrate lessons and, more importantly, help teachers to reflect on their own teaching,” said **Leona Lam**, a retired Hong Kong principal.

Education linked to economic development

High-performing school systems recognize that education is linked to economic development. These communities understand the importance of educational capital and therefore train students for relevant future jobs. Education

has always been the ticket to the middle class way of life and to sustaining our democracy, and in high-performing countries, this is even more apparent.

“Long Beach has one of the largest ports in the country, and realized that they could accommodate all of their high school pathway programs to prepare students to graduate ready to enter the workforce,” said Battelle for Kids’ **Mark Hartman**, a Long Beach team member. “They have human services. They have business opportunities. They have engineers.”

Cultural expectation of value

We set the cultural expectation of value for our children by the programs we run, schools we provide and classes we offer. In high-performing systems, the culture enables students to assimilate content and process information consistent with high academic expectations.

In some ways, everything comes down to systems grounded in strong relationships and mutual trust.

“In our system, the focus is always on collaboration,” said **Rhonda Kimberley-Young**, secretary-treasurer of the Ontario Federation of Teachers. “It’s not on competition. There’s not a system of punishment and reward for good results. In fact, if a school is seen to be doing a little less well, they’re given extra help and support. They’re not punished for it. It’s quite the opposite.”

Despite the enormous complexity of developing young people in any culture, there are lessons from this study related to the six drivers of student success that we must consider in the U.S. if we want to increase college and career readiness for all students.

It’s Battelle for Kids’ hope that through this study, we can improve our practices to accelerate student success. We also hope this will encourage a commitment to creating pathways for the unique success of every child, because student performance is inextricably linked to our economy, to individual student lives and to our future as a society.

To learn more, visit www.battelleforkids.org/go/global, or access the “Global Education Study LumiBook” at www.schoolimprovement.com/battelle-for-kids-lumibook. The LumiBook is a free online collaborative reading and learning resource developed in partnership with the School Improvement Network. ■

Editor’s note: Battelle for Kids is an Ohio-based, national, not-for-profit organization that provides counsel and solutions to advance the development of human capital systems, use of strategic measures, practices for improving educator effectiveness and communication with all stakeholders. For more information, visit www.battelleforkids.org.