

International Education News

What's new, what's good, and what's effective in education around the world

TAG ARCHIVES: ACCOUNTABILITY

Professional Learning in Top Performing Systems, part 2

Posted on [January 21, 2016](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

[The National Center on Education and the Economy's \(NCEE\) Center on International Education Benchmarking](#), has released two reports on professional learning environments in top performing systems: [Beyond PD: Teacher Professional Learning in High-Performing Systems](#) and [Developing Shanghai's Teachers](#). To explore and share the findings of these reports, the NCEE held a conference last week featuring presentations and panel conversations with the leading voices in education from around the world. This conference was also streamed live and can be [viewed online](#). Moderated by [Marc Tucker](#), president and CEO of NCEE, speakers included [Ben Jensen](#) (author of [Beyond PD](#)) and [Minxuan Zhang](#) (author of [Developing Shanghai's Teachers](#)).

Ben Jensen began his presentation with the questions, “What is at the core of high performing professional learning systems? What is the strategy to ensure effectiveness?”

Jensen argued that we need to move past the idea that there is a single answer. Instead, we need to understand the fundamentals behind effective professional learning. We need to think about an overall strategy for change, rather than specifics, such as how many hours should be required, or the regulatory environment. According to Jensen, high performing education systems around the world all have one thing in common. They are all really clear in their belief that school improvement = professional learning.

While countries such as Australia and the United States set high expectations for outcomes and leave it up to schools and teachers to meet those expectations in any way they see fit, top performing systems such as Shanghai and Singapore don't take the same approach. Instead they look for broad policies that will make sure organizations have great professional learning, and talk about accountability as being a cornerstone of good practice for professional learning. While Australia and the U.S. see a dichotomy between development and accountability, higher performing education systems look at the two as interconnected, with several individuals directly accountable for the quality of professional learning.

Jensen explained that assessment of student learning is at the heart of professional learning in high performing education systems. These systems recognize how difficult it is to assess student learning well, and yet how fundamental it is to good teaching. They start by identifying student learning needs, and then how to change instruction. They look at evidence, try new things, work together, and evaluate impact. This inquiry approach has different names in different countries. For example, Singapore has Professional Learning Communities, while Shanghai has Learning Groups. Yet, these approaches are all focused on teacher learning and aligned with accountability (not focused solely on outcomes). Responsibility is shared, and individuals are held accountable for how well they collaborate with each other.

To read the full report: [Beyond PD](#)





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Do Charter Schools in Colombia Provide Sufficient Accountability and Choice?

Posted on [July 8, 2015](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

In 1999, Colombia joined many other countries in amplifying educational options by introducing a form of charter schools called Concession Schools (Colegios en Concesión). So far, the Concession schools have been confined to the capital city, Bogotá, where they grew to number 25 in 2003, remaining at that count through 2014. During that period, they accounted for 4 percent of the nearly 1 million students in the city's primary and secondary schools.

In “[Theory versus Reality in Charter Schools in Colombia](#),” a paper published at the [National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education](#), Dr. Brent Edwards Jr. and Hilary Hartley go beyond assessing academic outcomes to examine the process of authorization, evaluation, and enrollment to determine the degree of accountability and choice the Concession Schools offer.

Edwards and Hartley find (a) that competition among schools has not been realized due to an insufficient quantity of charter schools from which parents can choose (with the implication being that public schools do not feel pressure to compete for students) and (b) that the government's ability to hold schools accountable has been limited by a lack of clear performance criteria, by weak evaluation methods, and by the politically charged relationship between the government and charter schools.

While the paper focuses on the original CEC (i.e., charter school) contracts that were set to end at the conclusion of 2014, Dr. Edwards provided IEN with an update on what's happened since then:

While the leftist mayors of Bogotá have since 2004 been opposed to the CECs because they represent a form of privatization, Mayor Petro, in May 2014, proposed the following: three-year contract extensions for 17 of the 25 CECs; one-year contract extensions for 5 CECs, after which point they would revert to government management; and, for the remaining 3 CECs, conversion to management by the government of Bogotá at the end of their initial contracts in December 2014. The basis for these decisions was a ranking of all public and CEC schools in Bogotá, with this ranking being the result of a weighted score based on academic performance on standardized tests (50 percent weight), student retention (25 percent), and school climate (25 percent). Those 17 CECs that ranked in the top 50 were deemed to have “good results.” It is not clear from where the data for this ranking came; the Secretary of Education for Bogotá stated that they came from “various entities and studies.”

Interestingly, however, in September 2014, the City Council of Bogotá obstructed the renewal of CEC contracts in accordance with the proposal mentioned above by the mayor. Approval from City Council—a democratically elected body of 45 councilmen—is required for contracts with the government that extend beyond one budget cycle, and in this case CEC contract renewal was voted down. The association of parents from CEC schools lobbied the national minister of education for support, and, indeed, other national ministers got involved (including the minister of government, minister of the interior, and minister of estate) once the President of Colombia came out in support of the CECs. These ministers offered to provide technical and legal support to the City Council of Bogotá, some members of which did not feel that they had the capacity to properly evaluate the situation and to make a decision related to a



budget commitments beyond the period of the current government. Yet others, closely associated with the teachers unions, voted down the proposal because they saw the CECs as a form of privatization.

In the end, despite pronouncements from the country's President regarding the importance of the CECs, despite involvement from the national ministers, and despite pressure from CEC parents and students, it was only possible, based on the laws regulating the city government, to extend CEC contracts for one year, except for those three poorly performing CECs that were initially scheduled to switch to government control at the end of 2014. This outcome resulted from the fact that Mayor Petro never resubmitted his proposal to the city council due to insufficient support from this body for the proposal to pass.



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Principal evaluation in China and the U.S.

Posted on [May 12, 2015](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

When principals and teachers are evaluated based on student achievement, what do they do to promote student learning? I recently spoke with [Min Sun](#), Assistant Professor at the University of Washington, who explained that a principal's leadership in promoting instruction might make a difference in improving student achievement. In 2012, Sun published a study titled "[Association of District Principal Evaluation with learning-centered leadership practice: Evidence from Michigan and Beijing.](#)" with Peter Youngs, Haiyan Yang & Hongqi Chu & Qian Zhao, which showed that one key difference between principals in China (where students earn top scores on the PISA exam) and in Michigan is the extent to which they can be instructional leaders.

China's top-ranked performance on the international PISA exam has piqued the interest of many Western countries that hope to learn from its success. As Andreas Schleicher, OECD director for Education and Skills, [has explained](#), "Obviously, one can't copy and paste school systems wholesale. But PISA has revealed a surprising number of features that the world's most successful school systems share and from which others can learn." In their study, Sun et al. (2012) found that a comparison revealed a few key differences in leadership approaches.

For example, in Beijing principals more frequently report, "supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating curriculum, protecting instructional time, maintaining high visibility, and providing incentives for student learning." In both Beijing and Michigan, district principal evaluation informed personnel decisions, professional development, and was used to hold principals accountable for student achievement; however, in Beijing principals were more likely to feel that their evaluation was used to determine merit salary increases or sanctions. While the content of each evaluation was similar,

"a significantly higher percentage of Beijing principals felt that district leadership evaluation emphasized teacher evaluation, provision of professional development programs for teachers, curriculum design, and supervision of student learning during school time than their counterparts in Michigan did....Moreover,

leadership behaviors, and organizational impacts, principals were more likely to engage in various learning-centered leadership activities.”

Sun et al. (2012) found that principals in Beijing have more teaching experience than their Michigan counterparts. Therefore, they are able to engage with teachers and students on the classroom level. As Sun explained, when a teacher is absent in Beijing it is the principal who covers their class. Since principals typically have extensive experience with instruction, they can step in to help a teacher who is struggling in the classroom. As stated in the article, “In China, almost all K-12 public school principals are former senior teachers who have demonstrated pedagogical expertise in classrooms, and principals in China are respected as head teachers.”

The authors also found that Chinese principals were more likely to perceive that their evaluation held them accountable for student achievement, which, they say, is not surprising given the long tradition in China of accountability based on test scores. As a result, “Chinese principals perceived a stronger impact of specific aspects of district evaluation.” The emphasis on the purpose, content, and evidence, of specific leadership activities meant that the principal was more likely to focus on “learning-centered leadership activities.”

All of this raises questions about the current high stakes accountability measures we see in the U.S. While policymakers would like to see better outcomes on standardized tests, might we also need to consider whether or not the people responsible for improving such outcomes know how to do so? And, when those in charge don’t have the capacity to focus on learning-centered activities that might promote achievement on standardized tests, might we see instead a corruption of the system, such as in the [recent cheating incident in Atlanta](#) that resulted in x teachers and school leaders being sent to jail? Will we begin to view [school leaders as untrustworthy](#) when it comes to evaluating classroom instruction?

In the U. S., this topic is also highly relevant at the moment as high-stakes accountability has led to a growing number of parents across the country “opting out,” or allowing their children to refuse to take high stakes exams. [Education Secretary Arne Duncan explained](#) that if the number of students refusing State exams continues to grow, the Federal Government may need to step in to address the problem.

While the U.S. looks to the East for accountability policies that can promote student achievement, in contrast, China looks to the West for policies that can promote whole-child development and creativity. However, in the efforts of policymakers in the East and the West we can see what happens when [“borrowed” policies confront cultural differences](#).

For example, in striking contrast to the U.S. parents engaged in the [growing opt-out movement](#), parents in China are focused on doing whatever it takes to help their children perform well on standardized tests. While Chinese policymakers are now starting to think about whole-child development, creativity, and student happiness—other things that children need, such as physical and emotional health—the primary focus remains on test scores. Chinese parents view the college admission exam as crucial for their child’s future success, and therefore they are willing to devote considerable time and money to preparing their children for it from a very young age. As a result, Chinese parents pushback when schools attempt to promote non-academic activities.

In addition to cultural factors that might influence student achievement, a new book raises questions about the connections we have made between test scores and education policies. In [Real Finnish Lessons: The True Story of an Education Superpower](#), Gabriel Heller Sahlgren presents the [\(somewhat controversial\)](#) idea that Finland’s high ranking on international assessments has more to do with economic factors than it does with educational factors.



conversation about how we can a) promote policies that cohere with real-world practice, and b) develop universal assessments that allow us to address global questions of educational equity, while also considering the needs of unique cultures and communities—and even individual stakeholders, such as parents, students, teachers, and principals.

—Deirdre Faughey

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Australia

Posted on [June 28, 2012](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

[Baillieu plan to get rid of bad teachers](#)

Topsfield, J. *The Age* (21 June 2012)

Under a plan to be released for consultation entitled “[New directions for school leadership and the teaching profession](#),” the Victorian State government plans to amongst other things, sack the worst 5 percent of teachers.

According to the plan, principals often view the process of firing teachers as burdensome: “This [current] process [of firing teachers] seldom results in the departure of the teacher and there is a strong perception among principals that it is cumbersome, lengthy and overly complex.” The plan’s other controversial suggestions include “teachers doing extra days of professional development during school holidays, teachers of hard-to-staff subjects such as maths and science earning more money and principals coming from professions other than teaching.” The intent behind the plans is to enable Victorian students to match the performance of students in places like Finland and Shanghai on international assessment tests, like PISA, in a decade.

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New Zealand

Posted on [June 27, 2012](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

[Parata keen to avoid another fight with teachers](#)

Young, A. *New Zealand Herald* (20 June 2012)

While Minister of Education Hekia Parata is keen to avoid another fight with teachers, her Ministry will be compiling and releasing some “useful” information based on the National Standards that is meaningful for learners, schools, and parents. Earlier, [Prime Minister John Key opened debate about league tables when he expressed support for them](#).

(League tables compare data from different academic institutions.) The teacher union believes league tables “would have a severely damaging effect on children’s education and would unfairly label schools and students as failing.”

[Professor Martin Thrupp](#), an expert on school league tables says, “introducing the system here would lead to schools

national targets.”

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England

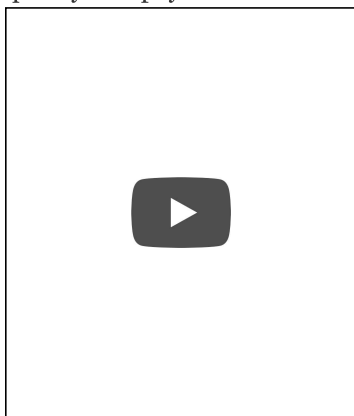
Posted on [June 18, 2012](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

[Teachers could have pay frozen after poor school inspection reports](#)

Vasagar, J. *The Guardian* (30 May 2012)

[The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills \(Ofsted\)](#) has announced that teachers could have their salary frozen after school inspections under new measures aimed at linking teacher salary to classroom performance. According to Sir Michael Wilshaw, the chief inspector of schools, Ofsted will “consider whether there is a correlation between the quality of teaching and salary progression.” Inspectors will look at anonymized data to ensure that school heads are using performance pay to increase standards. Some government officials have called for such reforms to discourage weak teachers from staying in the field. But, Christine Blower, the general secretary of [the National Union of Teachers](#), believes the measure would be detrimental to the teaching profession: “Performance management is supposed to be about encouraging teachers in developing their skills, not about judging pay or comparing pupil results...Teaching is a collegiate profession and this is a divisive, unrealistic and simplistic way of looking at how schools work.”

The following video highlights the methods and keys behind the new Ofsted observation of teachers to determine quality and pay:



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England

Posted on [June 11, 2012](#) | [1 comment](#)

Vaughan, R. *Times Education* (5 June 2012)

“Education providers have thrown their weight behind Michael Gove after he announced that free schools could be run for profit if the Conservatives secure a second term in office.” Gove believes that schools could “move toward” a for-profit model. While the for-profit model is unlikely under the current coalition, Gove said the quality of education would be “augmented by extending the range of people involved in its provisions.” Although teacher unions have expressed outrage at Gove’s proposal, Sir David Bell, who had been education’s highest-ranking civil servant until this year, now supports the measure. Bell “said that the profit motive should be trialled in some of the country’s most underperforming schools before it was rolled out elsewhere.” Others, like Trevor Averre-Beeson, founder of Lilac Sky Schools, an approved academy sponsor that runs the management of two schools for profit and is to take over two more from September, support Gove’s proposal. “It seems completely appropriate that if we do something successful, such as raising pupil attainment or getting a school out of special measures, we would get a bonus on a performance-related contract,” Mr. Averre-Beeson said. “And if we don’t, we would get a fine. I think it makes the running of schools more accountable.” Supporting the measure for the profit motive in schools, [a *Times Education Supplement* opinion piece](#) reads, “So come on, Mr Gove. Make everyone happy. Stop being coy. Allow for-profit providers to run schools. You know it makes cents.”

Gove’s thoughts on a wide-range of educational issues, especially issues related to school privatization and accountability, are addressed in the following video from an oral evidence session for the UK’s Education Committee:



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