

The Myths and Facts of Finnish Success

In conjunction with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Finnish researchers published “*The Finnish Success in PISA and some reasons behind it*”.

<http://ktl.jyu.fi/arkisto/publications/ierpd056.htm>.

The following summarizes their conclusions and contrasts the Canadian system

The Key Reasons for Finnish Success

- Attitudes** - The most powerful factor contributing to high Finnish achievement [derived from family]
- Family** - The next strongest contributor
- Library use** is in itself is a success factor. 44% of Finnish students borrowed from a library compared to 27% in Canada
- Within-family cultural communication** - parents discussing political or social issues, books, films, music etc, is high in Finland
- Matching Curriculum** - In math and science literacy the researchers noted that the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) examinations were well suited to the Finnish curriculum
- Curriculum** – Finland decentralized delivery of its national curriculum

Country and province	estimated average score
Finland	563
Alberta	550
Hong Kong-China	542
British Columbia	539
Ontario	537
Canada	534
Chinese Taipei	532
Estonia	531
Japan	531
Quebec	531
New Zealand	530
Australia	527
Newfoundland and Labrador	526
Netherlands	525
Manitoba	523
Korea	522
Liechtenstein	522
Nova Scotia	520
Slovenia	519
Saskatchewan	517
Germany	516
United Kingdom	515
Czech Republic	513
Switzerland	512
Austria	511
Macao-China	511
Belgium	510
Prince Edward Island	509
Ireland	508
New Brunswick	506
Hungary	504
Sweden	503
OECD average	500

- Cultural homogeneity** is cited as a success factor
- 93% of Finland’s population takes part in its **free preschool** education
- Students receive a **free hot meal** per day

As you can see, Canada’s scores are not far from Finland’s and the Canadian average is higher than many of our economic competitors.

Estimated average scores: *Combined Science: Measuring up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study The Performance of Canada’s Youth in Science, Reading and Mathematics 2006 First Results for Canadians Aged 15*, p 60

www.cdnsba.org

The Canadian System Compared

- Attitudes & Family** - Canada’s Between- and Within-School Variance is very low. Low variance on **both** scales means that: ‘*Canadian parents can feel very confident that no matter what school in the country their child goes to, no matter their income level, their child will receive a good education.* In other words, our education system is doing the job it is supposed to be doing and not relying on socio-economic factors to enable it.

Education at a Glance OECD 2006, p. 16

- More **libraries** would be ideal, however, Finland has about 15 people per square mile, Canada has about 3. We simply cannot afford as many libraries as Finland.
- More parents engaged in cultural communication with their children would be ideal. Canadian boards have embarked on community partnerships to better engage the whole community, including parents.
- Although our provincial curricula does not match the Programme for International Student Assessment exams, we should be proud to deliver among the best results in the world.
- It is a **myth** that Finland’s **national curriculum** is the reason for its high ranking. According to this study, the correlation between Finland’s national curriculum and excellence is **statistically insignificant**.

Finland’s improvement began in the 1990’s when it moved to a system more like what exists in most Canadian provinces. Finland decentralized the curriculum and its delivery to its **local school authorities**. It also made the curriculum more flexible and less detailed while increasing accountability and external testing programmes.

- Canadian school boards celebrate cultural diversity.
- Many provinces offer free preschool education.
- Many schools offer free hot meals to those in need and Breakfast for Learning, a charity that operates throughout Canada helps schools offer meals.

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