

How are Teachers Supported, Nurtured and Retained? **Candice Stanford**

Abstract: If we want to be a leader amongst nations again, we will have to start honoring and supporting our teachers. They are after all, educating our citizens, not only with facts and figures, but also morally and culturally. The present climate of totally undermining educators, funded through the Koch brothers and others, is devastating to our country. We need to look at countries that are doing it correctly, such as Finland, and act now, not 10 years down the road after ‘data’ has been collected.

Literature Review:

My research question is: **How are Teachers supported, nurtured and retained?** A comment made by an out-of-state teacher awoke me to the fact that I felt differently about being a teacher now than when I started. Back then, I felt really proud to be a teacher, and I was respected and admired for being a teacher, for my knowledge, my education, and my innovation. I had autonomy as a professional.

So where are teachers and education thriving? Finland. According to international benchmarks, Finland has risen and maintained a model contemporary educational system for the last three decades. The international community has been flocking to Finland to study what they are doing.

What they are not doing is evaluating teachers or using standardized testing on students. Finland has developed its own vision of education connected to inclusiveness and creativity rather than renting a standardized version that has been developed elsewhere, states Pasi Sahlberg, Director General of Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Finland has developed teachers’ capacity to be collectively responsible for developing curriculum and diagnostic assessments together rather than delivering prescribed curricula and preparing for standardized testing designed by central government.

In other words, Finland has defined and developed their own shared vision and moral purpose, not “renting” them from other people, as noted by Andy Hargreaves of Lynch School of Education at Boston College.

This is Finland’s approach: teachers in Finland are well selected, educated and supported. Opinion polls in Finland consistently report “teaching as one of the most admired professions ahead of medical doctors, architects and lawyers.” It’s easier to get into medical school than it is to get into the master’s education program at one of the Finnish universities. As a matter of fact, only one in 10 applicants make the cut. In 2010 there were 6,600 applicants for 660 positions in Finnish Universities.

Methodology:

Finland’s teacher success formula is one of trust, professionalism and shared responsibility. The specific components are:

- 1) Attraction: people are attracted to the teaching profession because:
 - . of the moral/cultural influence/to help society
 - . the education is challenging
 - . professional autonomy (there are no teacher evaluations, teachers are the professionals not some administrator) Finnish teachers acknowledge if they were to encounter similar external pressure for standardized tests and teacher evaluations as in England and the U.S., they would seek other jobs.

- 2) Selection: only the best and most committed are selected
 - . This selection does not mean the best and the brightest. Teacher education is designed in a way that will get the best from young people who have natural passion to teach for life, according to Pasi Sahlberg, Director General of Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture
 - . Successful candidates must possess high entrance exam scores, positive personalities, and commitment (this is not Teach for America with summer college credits and a brief fling of 3-5 years. Most Finnish teachers commit up to a 40-year career span). “In short, teachers in Finland expect that they will experience professional autonomy, prestige, respect, and trust in their work,” Sahlberg states. “First and foremost, the working conditions and moral professional environment are what count as young Finns decide whether they will pursue a teaching career or seek work in another field.”

- 3) Education: The teacher education program is competitive and demanding requiring a master’s degree with research-based qualification which attracts top talented high school graduates. The Finnish teacher education is based on and supported by scientific knowledge and focuses on thinking processes and cognitive skills needed to design and conduct educational research.

- 4) Support: “The question of teacher effectiveness or consequences of being an ineffective teacher is not relevant in Finland,” Sahlberg writes. The Finnish education system does not employ external standardized student testing to inform the public about school performance or teacher effectiveness. Rather, teachers have time during the school day to work together, reflect on their teaching, and to build shared accountability with leadership coming from the teachers. Teacher evaluations are not used due to the basic assumption is teachers are well-educated professionals and are doing their best in their schools.

Results:

Columbia University professor Henry Levin views what the Finns have done by professionalizing teaching a “wake-up call” for the United States. The Finns rose to one of the top academic performers in the world and they did it through teacher unions (95% of Finnish teachers are union members), minimal testing (at 18, 19 years old), national collaboration and elevating teaching to a high-statue calling.

Meanwhile, back in the United States and other Anglo-Saxon nations, what hasn’t worked for the past two decades is being re-invented and enforced with even a greater vengeance – that of force,

pressure, shame, top-down intervention, competition, standardized testing, easier passages into teaching and closure of “failing” schools.

Former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch calls it all “mean-spirited, punitive, and deeply indifferent to the real problems that teachers face.” Performance-based pay ties teacher rewards to results on appallingly designed tests of dubious validity and destroys teamwork among professionals who instead need to share what they know, she states.

Will we step up and reclaim education processes in our country as the Finns have done for their citizens? Or will we continue in the downslide of what the Koch brother’s and their ilk have in mind, which indoctrinate our youth for their purposes through curricula and even video games. This group is noted for following the success of the Nazi model for building their own youth movement, infiltrating college campuses, and, most recently, contributing millions of dollars to further effect public education. Just look at the devastation of education and teaching conditions in states like Wisconsin, and Arizona where Governors attempt to funnel public school funding towards paying for private school education.

Do we really want another Saltville, Virginia, where the Olin Corporation owned the local grocery store, the water system, the sewage system and the only school, leaving many workers with a 6th- or 7-th grade education? “The Olin Company was dirty and treated people bad, not like people,” said Shirley Baily who grew up near Saltville. “Most of the workers were poorly educated and they led them around like sheep . . .”

Are you willing to continue testing and evaluating, marching blindly into their utopian madness?

ACTION RESEARCH/SURVEY RESULTS

Survey questions were formulated based on the “tenets” of Finland’s educational system:

1. Professional Autonomy
2. Enough Collaboration Time
3. Education/Training is Valued
4. Teachers Have Moral & Cultural Influence in Society
5. Excellent Working Conditions/Professional Environment

The following five questions were given to 12 educators: classroom teachers, fine arts teachers and ATF Teacher Leaders. These are the results:

1. I feel I have professional autonomy as a teacher

0=strongly disagree, 3 disagree, 4= neutral, 5= agree, 0= disagree

2. I have than enough time to collaborate with other teachers to continue learning and growing as an educator.

Strongly disagree=1 Disagree= 6 Neutral=1 Agree=3 Strongly agree=1

3. My college education and advanced training is valued and I am able to put it to use in my current position.

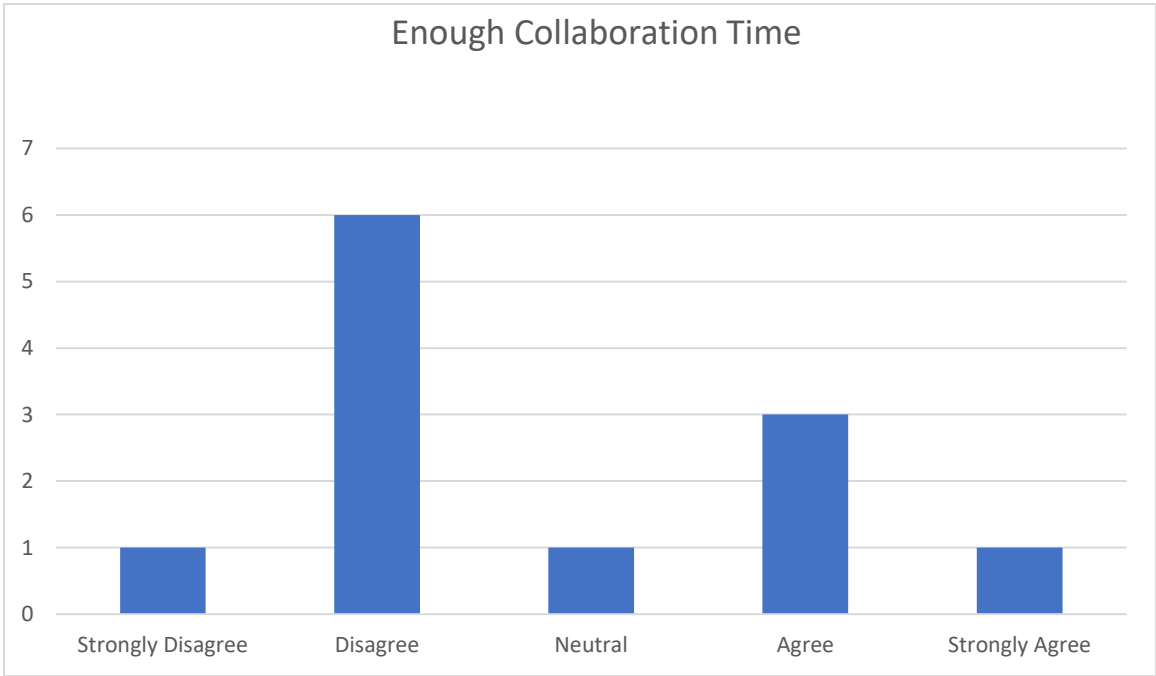
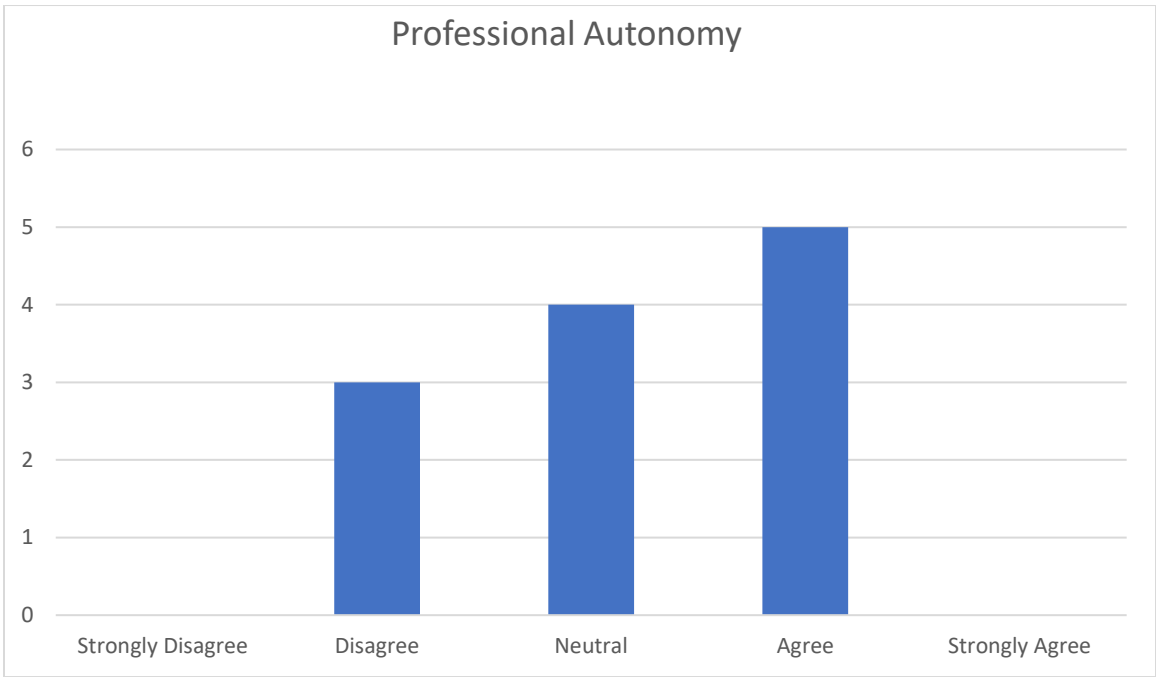
Strongly disagree=0 Disagree= 1 Neutral=5 Agree=4 Strongly agree=2

4. I am attracted to the teaching profession because of the moral and cultural influence I have.

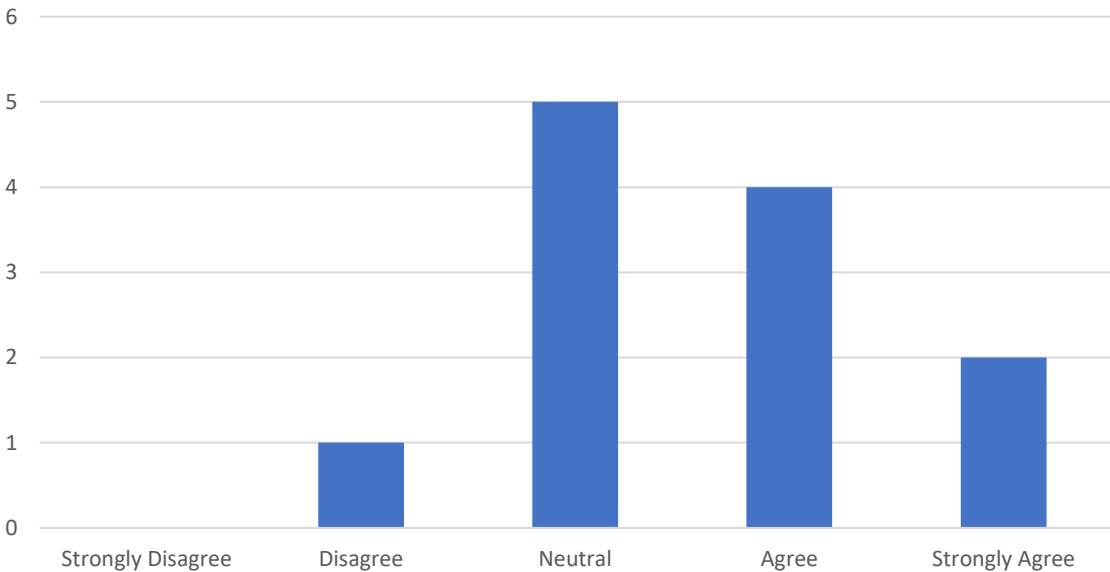
Strongly disagree=0 Disagree= 0 Neutral=2 Agree=8 Strongly agree=2

5. Because of the working conditions and professional environment that support and nurture my growth as a teacher, I anticipate staying in the teaching program.

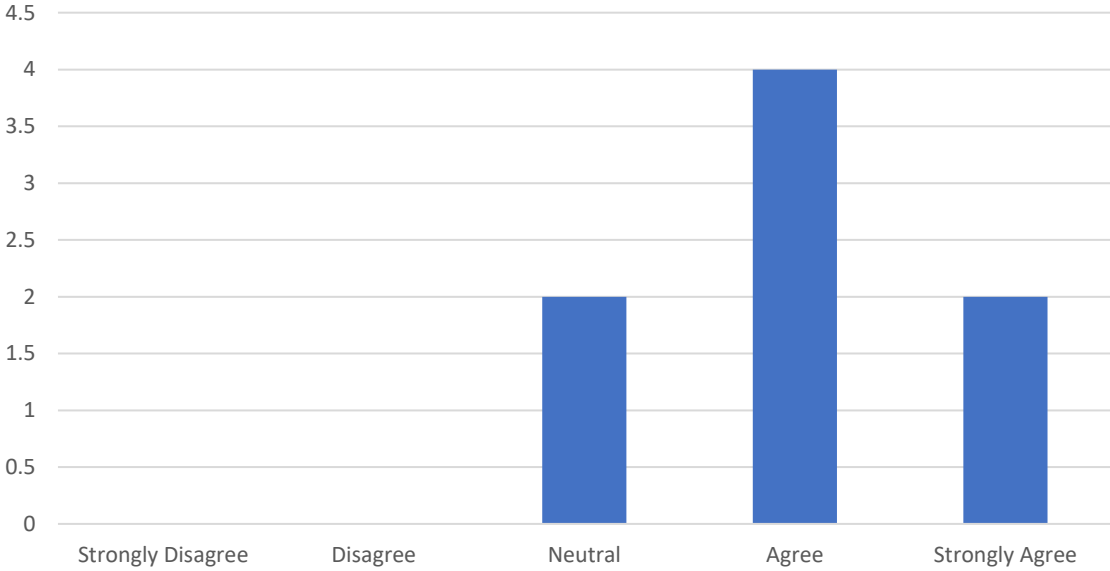
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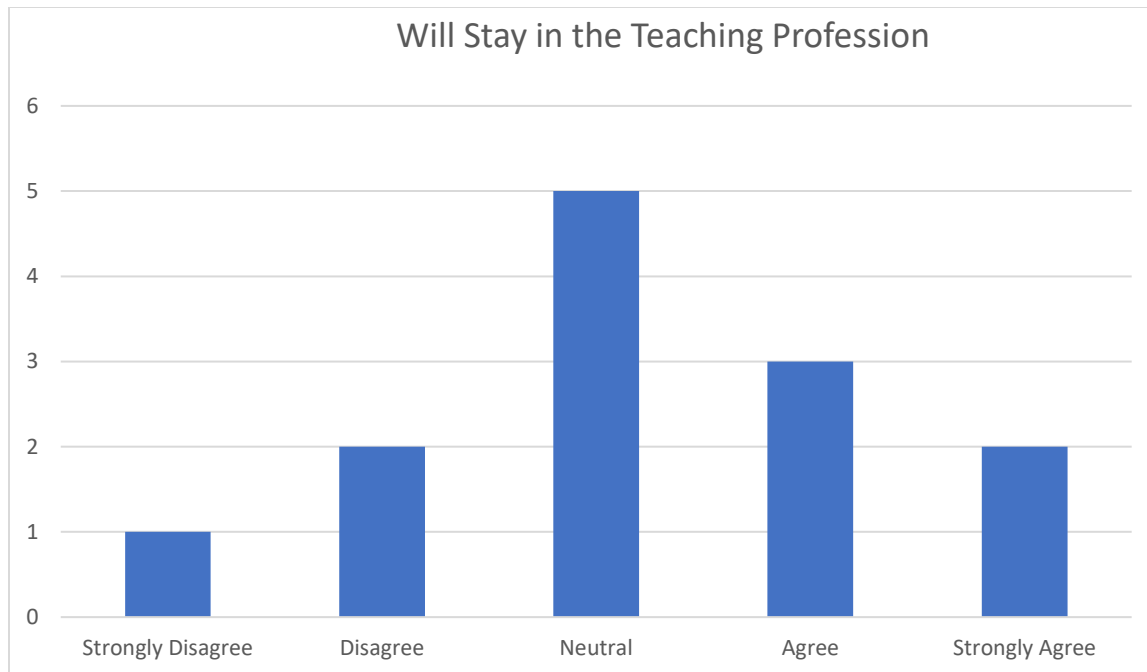


My Education is Valued



Moral & Cultural Influence of Teaching





Recommendations:

If it were my job to decide the future of education in America I would follow closely what the Finnish (and others) have implemented so successfully. I would ground my decisions based on what I also believe that education is the greatest endeavor, and how can I honor that while building environments for educators and students to thrive in.

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