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Evaluating Teacher Turnover Rates in America, Canada, and Finland

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Evaluating Teacher Turnover Rates in America, Canada, and Finland

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis
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Abstract

According to the Consortium for Policy Research in Education [CPRE] Report, *Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force*, researchers “found that [in the United States] more than 41 percent of new teachers leave within 5 years of entry” (Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force; Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey; 2014). This research project will review why America has high turnover rates in the teaching profession. The project will evaluate America’s teacher’s education program, then compare it to Canada and Finland’s workforce conditions for teaching staff in public schools. Specifically, the evaluation will focus on compensation, school climate indicators, teacher education programs for pre-service teachers, and opportunities for professional development for all teachers. Finally, a set of recommendations will follow-up the evaluation in order to reduce high turnover rates for teachers in America.

Key Words: Teacher Turnover, Education, America, Canada, Finland

Evaluating Teacher Turnover Rates in America, Canada, and Finland

All across America, schools are experiencing teacher vacancies and turnover. In particular, schools that serve students from preschool to grade twelve have high turnover rates of educators. According to Emma García and Elaine Weiss from the Economic Policy Institute's report (EPI) from the 2017-2018 school year, U.S. schools struggle to hire and retain teachers: "13.8 percent [of educators] are either leaving their school or leaving teaching altogether" (García, Weiss; 2019). In the research report, *Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It* from the Learning Policy Institute (LPI), Desiree Carver-Thomas and Linda Darling-Hammond state that in their research of educators leaving their profession in the 2012-2013 school year, they found that of the sixteen percent who left the profession, "two-thirds of teachers [left] for reasons other than retirement" (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond; 2013). Reasons for leaving include, "dissatisfactions with testing and accountability pressures (listed by 25% of those who left the profession); lack of administrative support; dissatisfactions with the teaching career, including lack of opportunities for advancement; and dissatisfaction with working conditions" (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond; 2013).

High turnover rates can be detrimental to students' educational growth and staff stability. When a teacher leaves the profession, the school is left with a vacancy. If the school struggles to hire credible, qualified, and passionate teachers, the students at that school receive a less-qualified teacher. In return, the students aren't given the opportunity to gain a well-rounded education.

Nebraska schools also have high vacancy rates. According to the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) in the *Teacher Vacancy Survey Report*, there were 321 unfilled teaching positions in the state of Nebraska during the year of 2019 (NDE; 2019). NDE noted the reasons for vacant positions were, “no applicants who were fully qualified based on endorsement area, no applicants, [or] preferred a specific non-fully qualified applicant over fully-qualified applicant” (NDE; 2019).

In this essay, I will compare the workforce conditions for teachers in America, Canada, and Finland. These countries have different vacancies and turnover outcomes. I will be exploring how the workforce conditions are linked with teacher turnover rates.

Assessing Workforce Conditions in America, Canada, and Finland

Assessing Workforce Conditions in America

Current high vacancies and workforce conditions in America can be linked to teacher turnover rates. After reviewing various research articles and reports, three main issues emerge that are linked to high teacher turnover rates in America. These issues can be defined as low wages, school climate indicators, and a lack of teacher preparation for the profession.

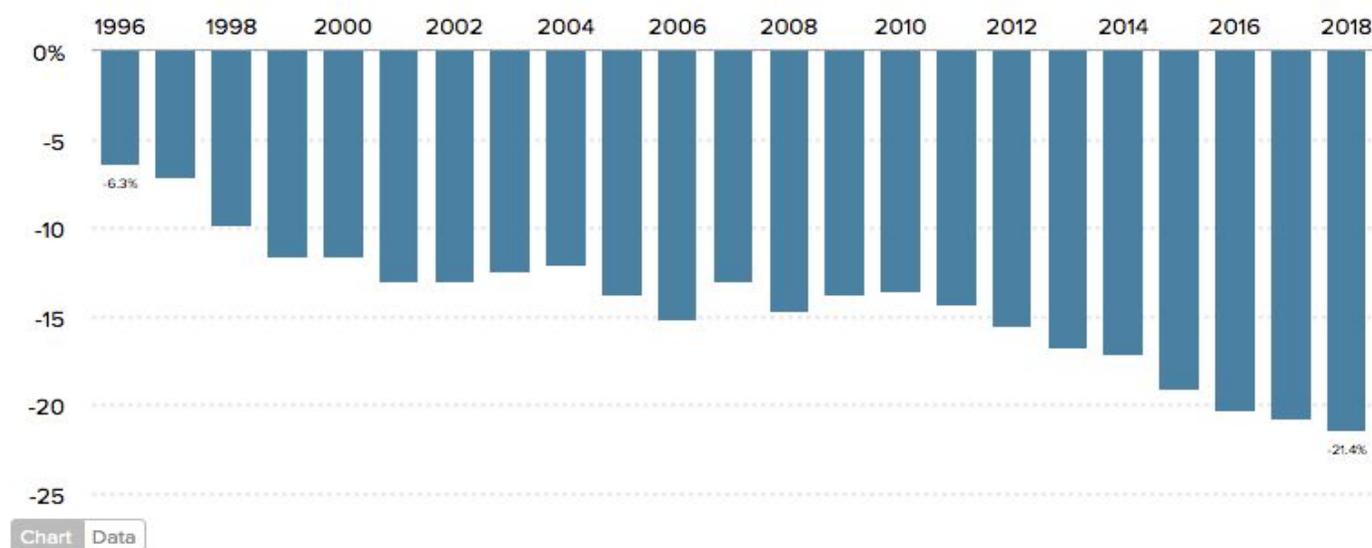
Wages. Comparable to other professions in the United States, teaching in public schools has always been linked to lower salaries. According to the National Education Association, the national average starting teacher salary from the year of 2017-2018 is \$39,249 (NEA, 2018). The Economic Policy Institute describes the necessary salary for a family of four to live comfortably in Omaha, Nebraska is \$86,967 (EPI, 2017). Though there are opportunities for teachers to add more money to their salary by additions of degrees and coaching positions, the base salary for teachers in America is lower than the necessary cost to successfully support a family of four. In

addition, the EPI notes in their third report, *Low relative pay and high incidence of moonlighting play a role in the teacher shortage, particularly in high-poverty schools*, in ‘The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market’ series by Emma García and Elaine Weiss, that teachers earn about 21.4% less than comparable workers in salaries (García, Elaine; 2018). This study has reviewed the decrease in pay for teachers from 1996 to 2018. Figure A represents the drop in pay over the past 18 years.

Figure A

Teachers earn a record 21.4 percent less in wages than comparable workers

Teacher wage gap—public school teacher wages relative to comparable workers, 1996–2018



Note: The figure shows regression-adjusted weekly wage penalties for public school teachers (elementary, middle, and secondary) relative to other college graduates. [...](#)

Source: Adapted from Sylvia Allegretto and Lawrence Mishel, *The Teacher Weekly Wage Penalty Hit 21.4 Percent in 2018, a Record High*, Economic Policy Institute and the Center on Wage and Employment Dynamics at the University of California, Berkeley, April 2019

Economic Policy Institute

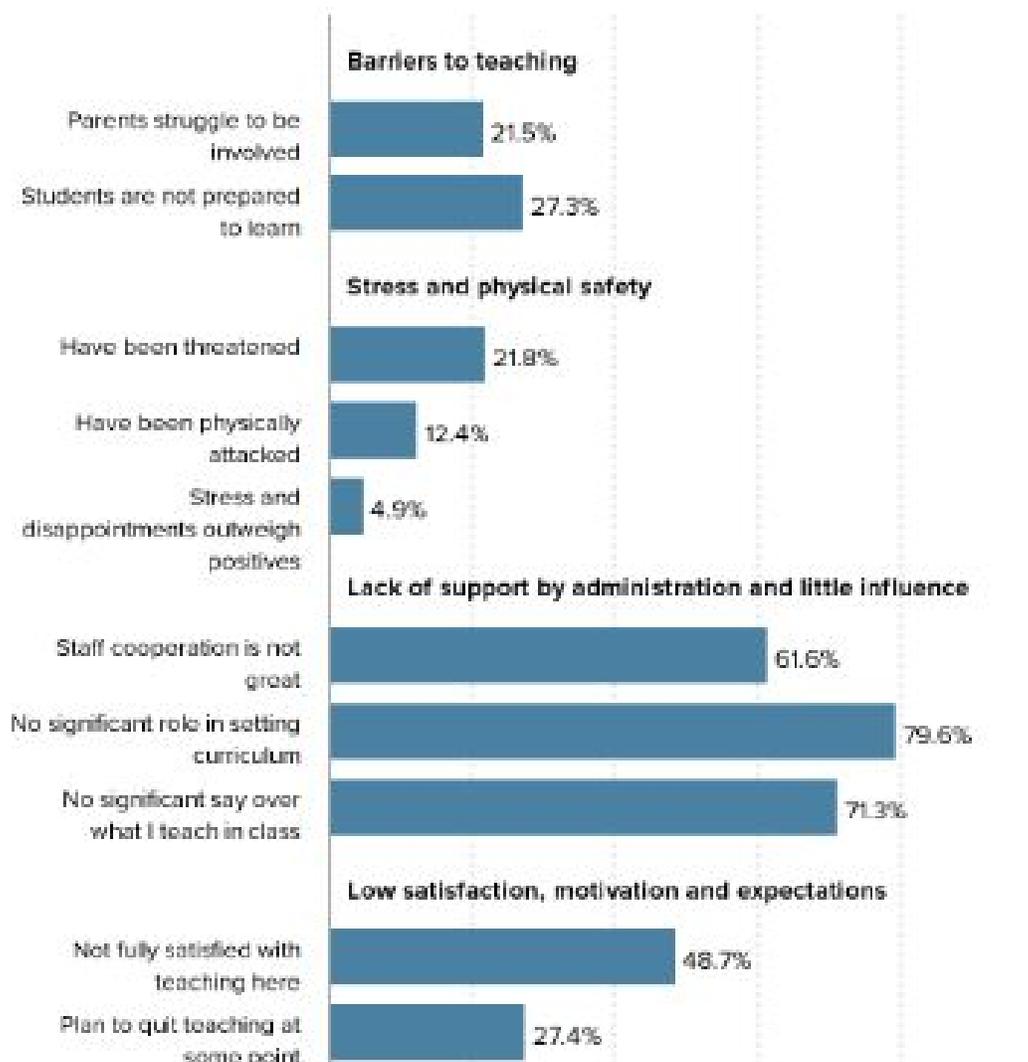
Emma García and Elaine Weiss also stated in their report that there is a significant gap between base salaries for teachers in high- and low-poverty schools (García, Elaine; 2018). The average

base salary for a teacher in a low-poverty setting is \$58,900, whereas a teacher in a high-poverty setting is \$53,300 (García, Elaine; 2018). That can be characterized as a gap of \$5,600. This piece of evidence can be linked to higher turnover rates in high-poverty schools due to school climate indicators.

School Climate Indicators. Another factor that has contributed to the poor work conditions in America and is linked to teacher turnover is the climate of any given school. In Emma García and Elaine Weiss' second report, *U.S. schools struggle to hire and retain teachers*, in 'The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market' series, they note that in all low-poverty schools, on average, 6.2% of teachers left the profession entirely, whereas, in all high-poverty schools, 8.2% of teachers left (García, Elaine; 2018). It is no question that teachers all across America face many kinds of obstacles when educating the youth of tomorrow. Weiss and García note in their second report that there are many, if not more, severe obstacles in a high-poverty school than in a low-poverty school. Figure B states school climate indicators they have found in their own research.

Figure B

School climate indicators are tough across the board



Note: Data are for teachers in public noncharter schools. See notes to Tables 1–6 for full definitions of the given indicators.

Source: 2015–2016 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) microdata from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

In addition, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) notes that in the school year after 2011-2012, 62.7% of teachers in ethnically diverse schools moved schools in the same district. However, only 46.8% of teachers moved schools within the same district who were originally in schools in which 5-19% of students are ethnically diverse (NCES; 2013). Finally, many teachers feel unsupported in their profession by their school administrators. In the research article from the Learning Policy Institute named *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.*, Leib Sutchter, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Desiree Carver-Thomas comment that “teachers who find their administrators to be unsupportive are more than twice as likely to leave as those who feel well-supported” (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, Carver-Thomas; 2016). In addition, they present associated factors due to lack of support of an administration, such as the absence of professional learning opportunities and time for collaboration with other teachers on their team (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, Carver-Thomas; 2016).

Teacher Preparation. In America, high rates of vacancies and turnover in the teaching profession could be linked to a lack of teacher preparation for pre-service teachers. The Learning Policy Institute states, “teachers with little preparation tend to leave at rates two to three times as high as those who have had a comprehensive preparation before they enter (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, Carver-Thomas; 2016). In any four-year baccalaureate program, it is vital that pre-service teachers are given the correct support and experiences to be prepared for their first year of teaching. According to the NCES, between the school years of 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, 52.6% of first-year teachers in the United States moved districts to be in another school district (NCES, 2013). In America, it is required of any certified teaching staff to have a

four-year bachelor's degree and to complete a teacher training program. Though many teachers go on to gain other degrees, it is not required. In addition, over the past 10 years, there has been a shift in attitude toward the profession as a whole. According to Emma García and Elaine Weiss from the Economic Policy Institute, from the years 2008 to 2016, there has been a 27.4% decrease in the number of people who have completed the teacher preparation program. Figure C notes the significant changes in our nation's attitude toward the profession as a whole.

Figure C

Change in number of people awarded education degrees and enrolled in or completing teacher preparation programs, by degree and program type, 2008–2009 to 2015–2016

	2008–2009	2015–2016	Change 2008–2009 to 2015–2016
<i>Degrees awarded in education</i>			
<i>Total degrees awarded</i>	289,282	244,851	-15.4%
Bachelor's	101,716	87,221	-14.3%
Master's	178,538	145,792	-18.3%
Ph.D.	9,028	11,838	31.1%
<i>Education degrees as a share of all degrees awarded</i>			
<i>Total share</i>	12.0%	8.5%	-3.5 pp (-29.0%)
Bachelor's	6.4%	4.5%	-1.8 pp (-28.5%)
Master's	27.0%	18.6%	-8.4 pp (-31.2%)
Ph.D.	5.8%	6.6%	0.8 pp (13.8%)
<i>Enrollment in teacher preparation programs</i>			
<i>Total enrollment</i>	690,552	429,541	-37.8%
Traditional program	609,106	337,690	-44.6%
Alternative—IHE	42,851	25,678	-40.1%
Alternative—not IHE	38,595	66,173*	71.5%
<i>Completers of teacher preparation programs</i>			
<i>Total completers</i>	217,400	157,901	-27.4%
Traditional program	174,858	126,300	-27.8%
Alternative—IHE	17,750	12,484	-29.6%
Alternative—not IHE	24,792	19,107	-22.9%

* Almost the entire change is driven by the increase in the number of enrollees in these programs in Texas.

Note: Data include totals for 50 states and the District of Columbia. IHE stands for institution of higher education. IHEs offer traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs. Alternative—not IHE refers to an alternative teacher preparation program provided by an entity other than an IHE. Data for other years are available in Appendix Tables 1 and 2 at the end of this report.

Sources: Digest of Education Statistics 2018 Table 322.10, Table 323.10, and Table 324.10 (NCES 2018) and Higher Education Act Title II State Report Card System (U.S. Department of Education 2017a and 2017b).

Overall, teachers in America are leaving the profession due to low wages, school climate indicators, and lack of teacher preparation in college programs. Canada and Finland have both taken unique approaches in their education system to promote the profession and to make it a healthy working environment for all staff and faculty members.

Assessing Workforce Conditions in Canada

In comparison to America, Canada's teaching workforce conditions have shown to be the opposite. According to Empowered Educators, in their research analysis called *Canada: Diversity and Decentralization*, in Ontario, “only about 4 to 5 percent of teachers leave each year, and a 2011 survey conducted by the [Ontario College of Teachers] OCT found that 90 percent of teachers planned to stay in teaching for the next five years” (Empowered Educators, 2016). When comparing America and Canada, clear differences emerge. Two differences that make Canada’s teacher’s workforce conditions unique are the way they prepare their teachers for the profession and the implementation of professional development opportunities.

Teacher Preparation. In Canada, the source of teacher quality starts from the college education they gain before being in the profession. In 2014, Ontario, Canada reformed the teacher’s program in all 16 of their research universities. The National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) wrote in their research journal, *Canada: Teacher and Principal Quality*, that in the past 6 years, the program is exponentially more selective about the students they bring into their teacher’s education program. Now, only one in five applicants is accepted into the program (NCEE, 2019). Therefore, the program is becoming more competitive. Ontario is only training students who will excel in the position, making the teaching workforce more qualified to be in the profession. The NCEE states the Ministry extended the teacher program to be two

years, instead of one (NCEE, 2019) This change allows the opportunity for pre-service teachers to practice their skills in the practicum setting more often and to allow the teaching of more ideologies and theories. Their final change to Ontario's teacher's education program is the required qualifications for specific grades. NCEE states that "teachers are required to be qualified in at least two consecutive grade bands (grades 1-3, grades 4-6, grades 7-10, and grades 11-12)" in order to make the curriculum of the educational program to be more specified and allow more reflection time for any certain grade's intended curriculum (NCEE, 2019).

After graduation, school districts begin to narrow down their search for the best candidate by a selective and competitive hiring process. *Canada: Diversity and Decentralization*, also report the hiring process in Canada to be very competitive (Empowered Educators, 2016). They state that "a decline in the number of retirements and an increase in the number of graduates have meant that applying for teaching jobs has become more competitive, and school boards have become more selective in hiring teachers" (Empowered Educators, 2016). This statement alludes that only the top tier of teachers are hired, continuing a change in society's attitude towards this highly sought-after profession. Finally, once teachers are hired, they are required to undergo a program called, *New Teacher Induction Program* (NTIP). In this program, teachers are given an orientation by the school and school board, given a mentor throughout their first-year from more experienced teachers, and will undergo various opportunities for professional development (Empowered Educators, 2016). The mentorship, probably the most unique part of Canada's teacher preparation, can allow for mentors and new teachers to collaborate, co-plan, observe different types of teaching methodologies, and share tips and tricks

of the profession. This tactic might allow first-year teachers to feel supported and better prepared for whatever issues might arise in their own classroom.

Professional Development. Aside from the mentorship program that is implemented in Canada, another portion of the positive workforce conditions are the opportunities for professional development. Professional development “enables teachers to take on new responsibilities based on their interests and skills” (Empowered Educators, 2016). In Alberta, Canada, about 50% of the Alberta Teachers’ Association budget is used on professional development in their own school districts, which is far greater than in teachers’ associations in America. All teaching programs in Canada have at least 6 days for professional development worked into the school calendar so teachers can use paid time to focus on their own personal professional development in the profession (Empowered Educators, 2016). According to *Canada: Diversity and Decentralization*, “the professional capacity of teachers and administrators are considered to be the key to developing, delivering, and sustaining improved knowledge, processes, and practices for educational improvement” (Empowered Educators, 2016). In certain Provinces in Canada, there is a requirement to complete an Annual Learning Plan, which outlines their ideas for professional growth in their own position (Empowered Educators, 2016). This promotes the idea that teachers are trusted by their supervisors to take charge of their own professional growth.

In addition, the administration support allows teachers to be motivated intrinsically by their desire to develop their own professional growth. A direct way teachers can become leaders of their own professional growth is through the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP). The research articles, *Empowered Educators* and *The Teaching Career and Leadership*

for the Profession, state the goal of this program is to “support experienced teachers to undertake self-directed advanced professional development” (Empowered Educators, 2016). In this program, teachers research teaching methodologies for their own classrooms. They complete a formal project and presentation to represent what they have learned. This use of professional development in the workplace allows teachers to think more intrinsically about their profession and value staying in this career path.

Finally, the last example of professional development in Canada’s workplace for teachers is the implementation of the Additional Qualifications Program (AQs), which is presented in the research article, Empowered Educators, *The Teaching Career and Leadership for the Profession*. The AQ is a program in which teachers can gain extra experience and training to promote their own professional development and increase their base salary. It is the direct route by which teachers can move up the career ladder. Some examples of Additional Qualifications that teachers might participate in are: becoming an associate teacher, a mentor for new teachers, board consultants, or school/administration department heads (Empowered Educators, 2016). The purpose of the AQ programs is to “aim to develop and recognize teachers’ knowledge and expertise and to expand the knowledge and skills available to meet students’ needs” (Empowered Educators, 2016). AQs benefit teachers by allowing them to hone in on a specific career pathway or add more to their own salary. Both reasons create a profession that is appealing to teachers.

Overall, the implementation of high teacher preparation and professional development in the workplace has allowed Canada to have outstandingly low turnover rates in the teaching profession.

Assessing Workforce Conditions in Finland

Finland has been consistently highlighted in the news for the unique educational programs they have developed. In return, their view on the importance of education has a direct positive effect on the teaching profession. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) journal, *Education At A Glance 2019*, "In Finland, 92% of teachers consider that the advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages—which is the highest proportion among OECD countries, well above the average 76%" (OECD; 2019). Some attribute this to Finland's social view on the profession as a whole. The OECD says that 58% of teachers in Finland believe their profession is valued in society, whereas the OECD average is 26% (OECD; 2019). Empowered Educators' Journal, *Finland: Constructing Teacher Quality*, notes that the value of educators in Finland can also be attributed to the increasing focus on "preparing all teachers well with a research-based education program with strong clinical experience" (Empowered Educators, 2016). In contrast, the salaries the teachers receive are average compared to most countries. According to the NCEE's journal, *Finland: Teacher and Principal Quality*, "[in Finland] lower secondary school teachers with the minimum amount of required education are paid \$35,676 in their first year; at the top of the pay scale, they can expect \$46,400 a year" (NCEE, 2020). In comparison, "the OECD average for a beginning lower secondary teacher is \$32,202 and at the top of the scale, the average is \$55,122" (NCEE, 2020). It is easy to see that even though Finland pays its teachers average wages compared to the rest of the world, many teachers want to stay in the profession. Two ways that make Finland's teacher's workforce conditions unique are the way they educate pre-service teachers and the addition of professional development in their teachers' daily routine.

Teacher Preparation. In Finland, the education of future teachers is held to an incredibly high standard. The country's focus is on making the profession a suitable career. The root of this focus is specified in the Comprehensive School Act of 1970 and 1971. According to Empowered Educators' journal, the Comprehensive School Act "shifted the preparation of all teachers to universities; previously elementary teachers had been trained in teachers' colleges" (Empowered Educators, 2016). All teachers are now required to gain their education at one of Finland's eight universities that include teacher education programs. Since there are only eight universities with teacher education programs, the selection process is highly competitive. In order to gain access to the highly coveted education program, students must pass a national entrance exam, called the VAKAVA. Empowered Educators states that the exam "draws on [students] abilities of inference and analysis" (Empowered Educators, 2016). Of the 7,000 students in 2014 who took the VAKAVA, only 660 students received acceptance into the teachers' program (Empowered Educators, 2016). After passing the VAKAVA, prospective students must undergo an interview to show positive presentation skills. At Helsinki University in 2014, 360 applicants received interviews, while only 120 students received acceptance into the program (Empowered Educators, 2016). This highly competitive program makes the degree worthwhile and highly appraised in society. In addition, the process selects the best people to become teachers, which in return, may contribute to the high number of teachers who find this profession so appealing.

Once accepted into this selective program, "primary school teachers are required to major in education, with a minor in two primary school curriculum subject areas" (NCEE, 2020). Students become more familiar with specific subject areas due to this requirement. The most

unique part of Finland's pre-service teacher education program is the requirement to obtain a master's degree prior to teaching full-time. Empowered Educators states, "all students enroll in a five-year master's degree level education program: three years of undergraduate study and two years of master's degree coursework" (Empowered Educators 2016). The curriculum focuses on how to "create learning-focused curricula" and how to teach all types of learners (Empowered Educators 2016). Linda Darling-Hammond agrees with the mission behind Finland's teaching education program, stating "The egalitarian Finns reasoned that if teachers learn to help students who struggle, they will be able to teach all students more effectively and, indeed, leave no child behind." (Hammond, 2016). In addition to the master's degree that students receive, they are also primed with a substantial amount of clinical experience which happens in a teacher-training school. Teacher-training schools are public schools where student teachers can come in often to learn from experienced teachers in a real-life setting. They are also funded by "universities through their overall budgets issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture" (Empowered Educators, 2016). Overall, the students in the teacher education program in Finland gain experiences like no other to directly help them in the field.

Professional Development. Finland offers various opportunities for professional development and support for their teachers. Finland's trust that teachers will do their job correctly shapes their vision of professional development. Empowered Educators notes that "teachers are considered valued professionals who are capable, autonomous, and independent, and in fact, fully responsible for their work in the classroom" (Empowered Educators, 2016). In addition, "teachers' work is evaluated by their principals, and often involves a one-on-one private conversation that may focus upon issues like individual growth, participation in

professional development, contributions to the school, and personal professional goals” (Empowered Educators, 2016). In the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), 28% of middle school teachers reported they were given no formal appraisals by principals and 37% of Finnish middle school teachers have never received formal feedback on their teaching (Empowered Educators, 2016). To further this statement, Empowered Educators has represented the trust given to educators by these examples:

Significantly, teachers have the primary responsibility for determining the need for student support and the form that such support takes. This effort is not left until the formal evaluation and tests are completed, or until annual exams are over. Rather, teachers approach these issues as important to address in the moment—an instantaneous, “real-time” response to student needs. In the classroom, this means that teachers are consistently re-arranging student groups, identifying children who need help, paying special attention to the student who has questions; misunderstands; to the student whose attention lags; as well as if there are more considerable challenges with comprehension, analysis, or understanding. (Empowered Educators, pg. 4, 2016)

In addition to the trust teachers are given, they are also issued multiple opportunities for collaboration, preparation and plan time, and professional development. On average, primary level teachers only spend around 677 hours of teaching per year, whereas the OECD’s average of instructional time in 2018 is 783 hours (OECD, 2018). Finnish teachers spend 100 fewer hours teaching than a teacher in any other country. Also, according to Empowered Educators, in any typical school day, there may be up to 90 minutes of recess time for the students, allowing

teachers to have time to work (Empowered Educators, 2016). The time spent not instructing can be used for collaboration, plan time, or professional development.

Overall, Finland's teaching workforce conditions have shown to be very positive because of their teacher's education program and various opportunities for professional development.

In conclusion, America's workforce conditions for teachers differ from Canada's and Finland's. Issues found in America's workforce conditions that could be linked to high teacher vacancies and turnovers can be defined as wages, school climate indicators, and a lack of teacher preparation. In Canada and Finland, teachers are willing to stay in the profession because of their appealing workforce conditions. Three similarities between Canada and Finland are the teacher preparation methods, the expression of trust towards the teaching staff, and the addition of professional development into teachers' career paths. According to Leib Sutchter, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Desiree Carver-Thomas in *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the US*, there are possible recommendations to help reduce high teacher turnover in the United States. Some recommendations they include are: creating competitive compensation packages, adding mentoring programs to first-year teachers, creating more opportunities for professional development, strengthening principal training programs, and removing barriers in all states' education certification processes (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond; 2013). In addition, Zach Gould, a graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, created a well-researched action plan to assist first-year teachers. His research program, *Improving Teacher Retention Rates through New Teacher Support Strategies*, displays a four-step action plan. First, all first-year teachers will participate in "New Teacher Workshops" where they will learn new skills and connect with other new teachers (Gould, 2020). Secondly,

new teachers will be given a mentor to collaborate with during their first couple of years (Gould, 2020). Next, new teachers will be given paid time to observe master teachers in order to learn new strategies to add to their own teaching (Gould, 2020). Finally, new teachers will move into the role of mentorship to another new teacher so they can build confidence and share their knowledge with another teacher (Gould, 2020). Gould's action plan will inevitably assist new teachers to gain more knowledge and confidence in their new profession. Overall, the recommendations given will help all new teachers feel more supported in their new role. Most of these recommendations are already present in Canada and Finland's education program. In conclusion, it is easy to see that America should model after Finland's and Canada's education programs and opportunities for professional development in and out of the classroom.

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