

## What Was Left Behind

Prepared by Petra Schmid-Riggins

We've been asked why we devoted countless unpaid hours to the writing collaborative.

We've been asked if it was good to present our report to NEA leadership.

We've been asked what this journey was like.

We've been asked if we wanted to make a difference.

But have we been asked what was left behind "what was deleted and significantly changed"?

I don't think any of the members of the Writing Collaborative have been asked; I know, I haven't.

Yet it's such an important question. Because maybe, just maybe, if we can openly present what was left behind, we can encourage others to do the same and positively influence what is ahead. May I share some of the major deletions and significant changes of our report "**Changing the Story**: Transformation toward Fair Accountability and Responsibility in Public Education". There is something important about reflecting on what was left behind and on learning how some of the writers felt when realizing what was left behind despite bringing attention to it. The WC spoke out before, during, and after with no avail.

So what did some leave behind? May I share some of the responses, and in sharing bring awareness to the process of eliminating authentic voices. What I share directly aligns with the personal narrative "It's Time to Speak Out: Comparing Reports".

### **Ed Kitlowski on what was left behind from the Introduction.**

Regarding my introduction, I was never given a reason why it was deleted. After the so-called due date, I was told it had to be edited. I played "phone tag" with Elizabeth Evans for a few days. Frankly I questioned the need for editing and suspected there might be other motives. In a conversation I had with Elaine, she suspected the same. I was never told that it was deleted. I spoke with Elizabeth in Washington D.C. and she did not state specifically why the introduction was deleted.

In looking at who gives money to VIVA, the Gates Foundation does. As several others have since unearthed, there are questionable ties between VIVA and anti-education reformers. There are a great deal of corporate ties to education with monetary rewards. Someone once said that until teachers control a monetary aspect of education, they will never have a voice in running schools.

I was disappointed that there was another round of editing our report and feel the edited version does not do justice to the intent of the teachers who originally responded to the question. I originally suspected the intention of the collaborative when we received the very short timeline which essentially eliminated substantial research. The timeline also forced consensus. I enjoyed

the experience and am glad I participated. It is great to meet teachers from all over the country who share the same passion for reform. I think we still have not identified what issue will make a difference. I personally think the idea of America values in American education might be it. It is hard to argue against that.

*Introduction written by Ed (deletions):*

Schools as we know them have not always been this way. In fact, school reform has been a constant. The current design of schools has been greatly influenced by events in the twentieth century. In 1913, Edward Lee Thorndike published his book, *Educational Psychology: The Psychology of Learning*. His book contradicted current ideas but became the basis for education pedagogy. During the First World War, the military had no test to distinguish the intelligence of its recruits. Robert Yerkes, then President of the American Psychological Association and a committee including an army officer, designed the Army Alpha and Beta tests. These would lay the groundwork for national tests and high stakes testing. In 1929, Jean Piaget published his book, *The Child's Conception of the World* which became a context of educational pedagogy still used today.

The Civil Rights movement had a major impact on education and schools in the United States, and marked significant intervention in America's public schools by the federal government. The *Brown v. Bd. of Education* case ended legal segregation and was reinforced with federal power. It also began a movement of more inclusive education.

The decade of the sixties was one of major federal interventions into how public schools were run. In 1965 as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, Congress passed The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which not only provided federal funds but also continued major intervention by the federal government. Head Start and The Higher Education Act were passed by Congress and provided federal money to states for preschool programs and post-secondary education. It also established the National Teacher Corp.

In 1975, Newsweek published a story, "Why Johnny Can't Write" whose title is reminiscent of the 1950's book, Why Johnny Can't Read. Education reform became part of the national debate and governmental concern. The 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled "A Nation at Risk" called for changes in most aspects of education from lessons to teacher training. In response, the state of Massachusetts passed in 1993 The Massachusetts Education Reform Act, which required statewide curricula and high stakes testing. It became the model for the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) sponsored by the senator from Massachusetts, Sen. Ted Kennedy.

The bipartisan supported law required schools be held accountable for the education of its students with standardized tests used as the measure of growth. Other aspects of the law required schools to report violence and attendance. Schools were expected to improve each year as Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). There were penalties for schools that did not meet AYP which included take-over of the school by state government. At face value, it sounded like a great plan.

The NCLBA changed the relationships of teachers to students and administrators to teachers. School administrators made AYP paramount, even to the point of changing student responses on tests. School systems began dropping music, art and physical education in order to have students receive more math and reading instruction as a means to have more students pass the high stakes tests. The NCLBA created a toxic environment of high stakes testing.

What most people did not realize, including the politicians who voted for the law, is that under the provisions of the NCLBA, most if not all schools in the United States would be deemed failing by 2014. The law required all students to be on grade level in math and reading which is just not possible. The NCLBA contradicted the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; it did not take into account the effects of disabilities, poverty, language, or immigration and it shifted the paradigm of teaching. Teachers now had more at stake with the results than the students did. The legislation was based on the erroneous premise that teachers were too lazy and needed some fear to do their job, or were incompetent and needed to be identified and culled. This perspective became the position of many so-called reformers.

#### BEGIN QUOTE FROM REPORT BOX

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#### END QUOTE FROM REPORT BOX

President Obama made it clear that education was a priority of his platform. His new plan, called *Race to the Top*, requires states to forego their educational autonomy. States were required to adopt common standards and link standardized test results to teacher evaluation simply to apply for Race to the Top funding during *The Great Recession of 2008-2009*. The direction of education reform maintained a story of teachers being lazy or incompetent. It also incorporated ideas of accountability adopted from the business sector. The new method of evaluating teacher effectiveness was to measure the value added by a teacher. This concept would require increased testing.

Despite these attempts to elevate schools, American students still lag behind other countries on tests given to students around the world. One country that ranks among the top is Finland, which started its education reform around the same time as the National Commission's report. Yet Finland took a much different route. Unlike the United States which put emphasis on testing outcomes, Finland's government focused on authentic equity of schools. Interestingly, there are no private schools in Finland. Representatives from many countries, including the U.S. have gone to Finland to seek answers.

Pasi Sahlberg, director of Finland's Ministry of Education's Center for International Mobility recently published a book entitled *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from*

*Educational Change in Finland?* Finland has no standardized tests with one exception, a test for entry into universities. One question Sahlberg says Americans often ask is how Finnish teachers are held accountable. His response is “Accountability is something that is left when responsibility has been subtracted.” Teachers in Finland come from the top percentile of graduates and must have a Master’s Degree. Teachers are among the best paid professionals and are given a great amount of discretion in terms of curricula. There are no demands to follow a prescriptive lesson plan. In fact, Finnish teachers can design their own curricula and choose their own books to fit the needs of their students. Students in Finland have more free time during school, less homework and go to school less days of the year. To most Americans, that sounds unbelievable.

#### BEGIN QUOTE FROM REPORT BOX

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#### END QUOTE FROM REPORT BOX

Many Americans dismiss Finland’s progress by pointing out the relative homogeneity of its population, which is not entirely true. When comparing Finland to states with roughly the same percentile of immigrants and roughly the same population, Finnish schools still do better. A better comparison would be between Finland and Norway. They are roughly the same size and population. Norway is economically more prosperous with its oil revenues. Norway has adopted the same educational mentality as the U.S. with regards to high stakes testing used to measure school and teacher effectiveness. Norwegian students score much lower on the international tests than Finnish students do.

In reviewing, very briefly, the events that have brought U.S. schools to this point, one fact is clear: teachers have had little voice in the reform movement. It is also clear that there are numerous influences on how schools are run with a great deal of money at stake. Legislators have been making most of the decisions, not educators. Americans do not question why individuals with no teaching background or public school experience are creating education policy as experts. Nor do most parents have a genuine idea of what is happening in schools. There is also a great deal of private money being put into education by wealthy people who have an agenda.

The year 2014 commemorates 100 years since the First World War, the war to end all wars. A common image of the First World War is soldiers going “Over the Top” and rising from the trenches to race across No Man’s Land in the face of deadly machine gun fire. Despite massive casualties, the generals still clung to these military tactics, even after those first horrific battles. At one point, soldiers of the French army refused to follow the orders which would result in more slaughter. Instead of listening to their soldiers and re-examining their strategy, the

generals ordered the soldiers to be shot for mutiny. Not all were shot but the point was made. Imagine the soldiers being told to run faster?

#### **Enid Hutchinson on what was left behind from Recommendation 5.**

I became a teacher because growing up I loved my teachers, and, I loved working with children. When I was growing up, teaching was a profession that was respected and honored by parents, students and the community. I couldn't think of anything else I'd rather do than work with children, make a positive difference in their lives and be appreciated for it. I believe God placed this desire in my heart.

However, by the time I graduated and began working, nothing could prepare me for the reality I was about to face. No college course could've taught me how to teach 6 classes a day AND "juggle" all the ins and outs, politics and additional daily responsibilities of teaching, grading, parent teacher conferences, faculty meetings, standardized testing, handling behavior problems, work emails, checking daily homework and classwork assignments, and the list goes on. In fact, teaching became more about implementing new policies in my classroom each year, teaching kids to pass standardized tests and learning how to use the new textbooks and scripted lessons the district wanted me to use to teach my classes.

Each year as a teacher I felt less and less valued, less and less empowered, less inspired, less appreciated; blamed for most things and even less in control of the safety of my career. Even though I felt this way, I was told by many teachers over the years to keep my head down, don't complain, don't say anything, keep your mouth shut, make lemonade out of lemons, and be thankful you have a job. It seemed that the key to a successful teaching career was based on how well administrators liked you. I told God that if He ever put me in a position where I could have a VOICE where I could be an advocate for teachers I would not abuse that privilege.

After 15 years of teaching and trying to keep up with each new educational policy I was responsible to implement by law makers who never set foot in a classroom, I received an email from NEA/VIVA to answer a few questions about concerns in education today. Wow. To me, it was a small cathartic opportunity to say what I have been wanting to say for many years without fear of retaliation and I took it, never really thinking anyone would read it, care about what I said, or that anything would come of it.

Amazingly, I was chosen to be a part of the VIVA 360 writing collaborative group to represent 945 teachers' voices from across our nation representing the state of Florida! I volunteered to be the lead writer on a topic that was near and dear to my heart, TEACHER EVALUATIONS. I felt this was a blessing from God. I was thrilled, knowing I had 15 years of teaching experience and knowledge to share in the only way I knew how to say it: real and uncensored. What rang true in the emails from the teachers across our nation was that teachers felt the evaluation process was punitive, unfair to be evaluated and rated by checklists and standardized test scores, teachers had no voice, and couldn't challenge administrator ratings. Teachers want autonomy to create their own lesson plans, and use resources they are inspired to use for lesson planning in the classroom. Teachers want to be in control of their own individual professional growth, and submit documentation of that growth as their summative evaluation for the year to preserve and protect

their careers from administrators who use evaluations for personal agenda. I was excited and honored to communicate this message.

I got to work with brilliant talented teachers from across our nation. I was flown to our nation's capital to speak to the NEA about the positive changes in education today that our nation so desperately needs. The process was amazing. It was a true privilege and honor to work with caring, passionate teachers who prioritized preserving authentic teacher voice. It was a labor of love, all the hours and personal time to put together the document and presentation for the NEA Accountability Task Force.

It wasn't until the plane ride home that I actually got to see the PRINTED REPORT of our work that was passed out to the NEA Task Force members. Tears rolling down my face, I searched and searched for the teachers voices that I slaved hours over to perfect in Recommendation 5 on Teacher Evaluations. Gone. Paraphrased. Deleted. NOT THERE. It read like a watered down boring textbook read, no longer capturing and representing what authentic teacher voices were trying to communicate to the NEA. I felt defeated, robbed and used. All of that time and effort for nothing. I was devastated that the people who had the ability to create positive change for our education system prioritized their own ideas/agenda regardless of what the teachers from across our nation were actually saying.

Where do we go from here? We need to create avenues of communication to where authentic teacher voices can be heard by those who need our expertise, guidance and knowledge. We are the experts and our voices need to be heard, speaking the truth without fear on issues in education today! Liaison positions need to be created where "liaison teachers" can act as a communicator for teachers to district board members so they can hear our ideas and concerns. Otherwise, we will continue to be run over with high stakes testing companies who make money off of our children. Administrators will continue to have unfair dictatorship power over a teacher's career. Teachers will continue to be blamed for everything. Teachers won't be paid what they truly deserve.

I want my voice as an educator to be valued. I want to go to work each day knowing I am in control of my own career and professional development, not based on standardized test scores and subjective administrator ratings. How I long to go back to 1975 when teachers were respected, honored and trusted as competent professionals who do the job they were educated to do: TEACH.

*Recommendation 5, lead writer Enid (significant deletions/changes):*

There are many stories of administrators, under pressure from districts to achieve high test scores, who use the evaluation process to get rid of teachers they feel won't help their school increase test scores. Unfortunately, the evaluation process is still too subjective to build credibility in measuring the effectiveness of a teacher in today's classrooms.

But the most troubling part of teacher evaluations today is how much power this process gives principals over a teacher's career. If teacher evaluations are conducted unprofessionally, the evaluation process can become very negative and stressful for a teacher, creating distrust and

P R 12/21/2014 4:56 AM

**Comment [1]:** Omission plus major additions/changes to this paragraph.

P R 12/21/2014 5:20 AM

**Comment [2]:** Omission

P R 12/21/2014 5:21 AM

**Comment [3]:** This sentence has been added as a concluding sentence to the revised previous section (see p. 28 in FR)

fear. Politics and personality clashes often dictate the firing or hiring of a teacher; evaluations do nothing to improve teacher quality, but instead serve to diminish it. Depending on the administrator, the evaluations can be scrutinizing, nitpicky, and micromanaging, which can leave a teacher to feel inadequate, overwhelmed, and doubting his or her ability as a competent classroom teacher. To be frank, there is plenty of circumstantial incentive for administrators to abuse their power in the evaluation system including: reassigning teachers who have less rapport with administrators; removing good teachers because of personality or teaching style differences; eliminating veteran teachers with higher salaries and replacing them with new and less expensive teachers; and/or hiring new teachers who don't question the status quo. Notice none of these circumstantial incentives actually help students; they merely realign the school to the administrator's personal preferences or convictions.

P R 12/21/2014 5:24 AM

**Comment [4]:** Omission -- entire yellow highlighted section

This creates a fearful sense of job insecurity which demonstrates that no matter how much a teacher improves they will never be safe—never feel fully positive, supported, encouraged, appreciated or hopeful for a bright future in their career. This is extremely dangerous, because in the hands of the wrong administrator, a few consecutive bad evaluations could result in termination and ruin a teacher's career. As with all learners, teachers are better off encouraged, inspired, and respected, rather than controlled through fear of disapproval. Even when an administrator is totally supportive, this can suddenly evaporate if an administrator retires or is transferred, and is replaced by someone new. Because these types of abuses exist within the teacher evaluation process, many strong, effective teachers are leaving the teaching profession, and the ones who stay aren't growing professionally as they would in a safe collaborative working environment.

P R 12/21/2014 5:30 AM

**Comment [5]:** Omission – entire yellow highlighted section

P R 12/21/2014 5:30 AM

**Comment [6]:** Purple text – partially reworded

P R 12/21/2014 5:31 AM

**Comment [7]:** Omission – entire yellow highlighted section

When intuitive teachers notice their students do not understand a particular lesson, they try a different approach, and often ask probing questions to figure out how to reach the student. We need to ask similar questions about teacher evaluations: What isn't working? How are we failing our teachers? How has the evaluation system failed? Where does the evaluation system need to be improved? How can we help new teachers succeed? How can we keep good teachers from leaving the profession?

Teachers want the best for their students and schools. To achieve this, teachers seek support, guidance, innovation, ideas and suggestions that directly inspire the work they are doing towards becoming the best teachers possible. They do not seek numerical ratings derived from a rubric where decisions resulting from political or personality differences are more common than we are comfortable acknowledging. Through the following recommendations, we hope to move in the direction of a supportive, collaborative, and encouraging accountability system.

P R 12/21/2014 5:32 AM

**Comment [8]:** Omission – entire yellow highlighted section

Note: These questions are essential

P R 4/16/2015 11:34 AM

**Comment [9]:** Pink highlight is part of FR

P R 12/21/2014 5:36 AM

**Comment [10]:** Omission

P R 12/21/2014 5:36 AM

**Comment [11]:** Addition: "Teachers are required ...method of evaluation."

P R 12/21/2014 5:38 AM

**Comment [12]:** Omission of yellow highlighted text

## Proposed solutions

23. Restructure the evaluation process to a supportive collaboration where teachers and administrators have equal weighted voice on teacher performance and annual evaluations. This restructure will include modifying the role of administrators to act solely in a supportive role for the collaboration between teachers. The restructure will also include fulfilling the "developmental-growth purpose" of teacher

evaluation by relying on content-specific collaboration between new and veteran teachers (akin to mentorship), especially within the same school.

Modifying the role of administrators to act solely in a supportive role for the collaboration between teachers, supports a teachers' individual needs much more than any observation with a checklist ever could. Knowing that a principal encourages teacher collaboration for the improvement of teacher effectiveness creates an entirely new paradigm shift.

Teachers know what their strengths and weaknesses are, and what they need to work on to be more effective in a classroom. A collaborative model empowers teachers to take control of their progress, identify which skills they need to improve, and allows teachers the freedom to choose how they go about doing that. Teachers can choose which professional development workshops they want to attend that addresses their individual professional development needs.

There is no disputing that when teachers of the same content area get together to share new innovative ideas that have worked in their classrooms, all who participate in the discussion benefits. Teachers are resourceful, always looking for ways to improve, constantly reflecting on the last lesson taught and how they could have done it better. When we fulfill the "developmental-growth purpose" of teacher support by relying on content-specific collaboration between new and veteran teachers within the same school, it provides teachers with knowledge, access to resources and support that helps refine the individual teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Giving ownership back to teachers for their own individual growth in a supportive collaborative model takes away the punitive stress of administrator-teacher observation and/or disagreements over evaluation ratings which tears down the positive relationship between teacher and administrator instead of fostering a relationship where the teacher feels appreciated.

**24. Require administrators to teach a class in order to stay in touch with current classroom issues, especially the classroom impact of education policy. "Teach a class" includes being responsible for all aspects of teaching including grading, parent communication, lesson planning, being observed and evaluated.**

Administrators who teach a class would be constantly reminded about the complex work of teaching and gain a deeper sense of what both students and teachers need in order to be successful. The farther away an administrator gets from the day-to-day nuances of a classroom, the more likely that person is to unconsciously start treating teaching like a trade-skill. Trade-skills are practiced and applied on objects—cars, hair, pipes, plants, wires, food, buildings, clothing, furniture, etc.—whereas teaching involves the growth of human minds. This sets teaching apart as a complex profession involving a wide variety of child psychologies, subject matter specificity, personality-based skills, and interlocking routines. All of these have significant repercussions when externally tampered with. Teaching is a profession, not a trade.

P R 12/21/2014 5:51 AM

**Comment [13]:** Omission of yellow highlighted section

Note: It appears that this paragraph was summed up/changed to the following sentence – "Giving ownership back to teachers...and appreciation."

P R 12/21/2014 5:53 AM

**Comment [14]:** Omission – entire yellow highlighted section

P R 12/21/2014 6:01 AM

**Comment [15]:** Omission of highlighted section

Note: Reflecting back on one of our phone conversations, all team members felt strongly about making this part of our FINAL draft.

P R 12/21/2014 6:05 AM

**Comment [16]:** Omissions/rewrite to the highlighted/purple text colored section



**27. Evaluate teachers on an individual basis, factoring in the student population they serve and how much growth each student has made during that school year. In other words, evaluations should not be based on student test scores.**

P R 12/21/2014 6:13 AM

**Comment [17]:** Omission – entire solution 27

There is much that simply cannot be accurately assessed on a high-stakes test. These assessments might determine whether a student has learned basic content, such as the history of the United States during the Civil War; but the assessments cannot measure the depth of understanding or the vastness of creativity that is found in an engaged classroom. High-stakes assessments provide no opportunities to demonstrate multi-level learning. There is no way to accurately measure a student's knowledge about expressive subjects such as art, music, dance, or foreign languages. Additionally, there is no measurement for intuition, innovation, or character – skills that should be valued, not only across the globe, but especially right here in America. Fortunately, most teachers are extremely flexible and have adjusted and retooled many existing lessons to meet curricula and standard requirements being forced into classrooms. It will be interesting to see what happens when the students of today become teachers; will they have the ability to think creatively? Will they be innovative when their education was driven by scripted curricula that left little time for skills such as creativity and innovation to be developed?

### **Josh Thompson on what was left behind from Recommendation 3.**

I should note that this narrative is my own and does not necessarily reflect the perceptions of every writing collaborative member, although it should capture the sentiments of many members. Most of the members became seriously suspicious of VIVA/NVS when we received an email on Thanksgiving morning asking us to condense, reorder, and revise the language of the recommendations we submitted (see attachment, content of e-mail). The email came with suggestions for our recommendations that did not reflect the voices of the teachers who wrote in, and were seen as distortions of teacher voice in order to approximate what Viva wanted recommendations to say. The team condensed and strengthened their recommendations without compromising meaning, message and teacher voice. Then, unfortunately, without time to review it, Elizabeth passed out the edited printed report minutes before we presented to the task force. Several of the writing collaborative members were disappointed to realize that further edits were made without: communication with- or consent by- writing collaborative authors and sharing the rationale for deletions/changes.

*Recommendation 3, lead writer Josh (significant deletions/changes):*

### **Statement of the Problem**

The U.S. Constitution did not name education as an enumerated or expressed power of Congress. The Tenth Amendment clarified that powers not specifically named and granted to Congress in Article I were reserved to the states and the people within those states. Thus, because Article I did not mention schooling, the Tenth Amendment clarified education to be the domain of the various states. This reality means that each of the fifty states' boards of education determine different education standards which creates the potential for the approximately 15,000 different districts in the United States to adopt different curriculum to meet those standards. The

P R 12/21/2014 2:04 AM

**Comment [18]:** Complete omission "The U.S. Constitution...meet those standards."

complexity of state-driven education means that education is funded differently and unequally between states and districts. Consequently, different assessment instruments employed by the various states make meaningful and valid comparison impossible. This inequity often finds its expression in terms of inequitable class size, financial resources, school facilities, technology integration, experienced teachers, textbooks and curriculum. These disparate realities make interstate and intrastate comparisons of student achievement illusory at best. Local prerogative and decision-making is often best but simultaneously is the root cause harming equitable education opportunities and the outcomes desired to improve all schools. Social justice critics say such inequalities create a permanent underclass shameful to democracy.

P R 12/21/2014 2:05 AM

**Comment [19]:** Purple highlight --  
Rewritten with the inclusion of some original text from FRD

Additionally, the American population has become more mobile over time with one-fifth of Americans moving annually and some districts reporting rates of almost half of all students changing schools annually. Education research shows these moves dramatically impact student achievement negatively, especially in grades K-8. For these students, the Constitutional reality of different standards and curriculum often spell disaster and dropouts. Similarly, schools face increasingly complex challenges that overwhelm existing resources as districts and states are challenged by changing demographics.

P R 12/21/2014 2:24 AM

**Comment [20]:** Rewritten with the inclusion of some original text from FRD

If it were not for the unlevelled playing field facing students today, there would be no opportunity to betray the public trust and politicize public education in the first place. It's time to close those gaps and level the playing field and make it open to the public again--one on which we share responsibility for our shared prosperity and demand for our neighbors' children and our own, the equal opportunity upon which the American dream depends.

P R 12/21/2014 2:21 AM

**Comment [21]:** Omission of remainder

**16. Create incentives for universities to raise the entry qualifications of applicants into education programs, and work to elevate the status of teachers rather than demonizing them; such as Finland has done compared to what is occurring in the U.S.**

P R 12/21/2014 2:57 AM

**Comment [22]:** Omission

Finland captured the attention of the education world in recent years due in part to their students' high scores on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). This math, reading, and science test began in the mid-1960s and it assesses fifteen-year-olds in twelve nations. The United States has never scored particularly well; in fact, the US has scored below several competing nations. This is seen by some as proof of the failure of American schools and, more directly, the failure of American teachers. The fact is, the results of this assessment, have not varied much since the beginning. The students in American schools do not perform as well as their international counterparts, but a broader look is necessary to accurately interpret the overarching results of this assessment.

P R 12/21/2014 3:05 AM

**Comment [23]:** Omission

P R 12/21/2014 3:05 AM

**Comment [24]:** Omission

P R 12/21/2014 3:05 AM

**Comment [25]:** Omission

P R 12/21/2014 3:07 AM

**Comment [26]:** See text box on p. 19 in FR

P R 12/21/2014 3:05 AM

**Comment [27]:** Omission

To begin with, Finnish schools focus on cooperation rather than competition, and students actually spend less time in the classroom, in test prep, or taking tests than U.S. students. They have less homework and more break times during the day -- up to 75 minutes per day of break. Not only that, but the school days are shorter, and perhaps most amazingly, teachers are

highly esteemed by students, parents, and the community. Students interested in becoming teachers must go through a competitive application process where only about 10 percent of applicants are accepted. Additionally, there are no private schools, so all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status, attend the same schools. Finland also provides healthcare and free lunches for all students.

While this sounds Utopian, it may provide us with a guidepost to follow. Ironically, as the U.S. looks at Finland with admiration for its stellar test scores, education in the U.S. is being forced to move in a direction that is totally contrary. American educators spend excessive amounts of time preparing for tests, giving tests, and eliminating (or severely curtailing) essential parts of a student's day that have proven to help them be successful (i.e., recess, music, art, and physical education). Considering the current increases of testing requirements in the U.S., the Fins will, no doubt, continue to outpace the U.S. for the unforeseen future.

However, there is one area where change could be implemented: the entrance qualifications for education majors. Other professions often have tough admission standards that will weed out students who may not have the aptitude for that line of work. It seems vital that prospective teachers should also need to have a certain level of potential before many years and thousands of dollars are spent on training and education. This is not to say that becoming a teacher should become some kind of elitist, exclusive club; rather, that competition may draw out the individuals with the most passion and skill and leave behind those who chose an education major because they believe the misconception that they will get summers off.

P R 12/21/2014 3:05 AM

**Comment [28]:** Omission

P R 12/21/2014 3:05 AM

**Comment [29]:** Omission

P R 12/21/2014 3:07 AM

**Comment [30]:** See text box on p. 19 in FR with minor changes.

P R 12/21/2014 3:09 AM

**Comment [31]:** This paragraph with minor changes makes up most of Solution 16

P R 12/21/2014 3:11 AM

**Comment [32]:** Omission