

## **U.S. schools shun proven reform models abroad**

Current trends in education are galvanizing me to express my thoughts on the future of education policy in America.

Tennessee is one among many states that is changing teacher evaluation procedures. In the future, teachers' evaluations in Tennessee and other states will include a component based on student test scores that our legislators and policy makers feel reflect teacher quality and ability to teach.

Our political leaders feel this is a necessary step to improve the standards in our schools. One among many other reasons for these changes is the mediocre performance of our students on international tests of student achievement.

A recent study conducted by the National Center on Education and the Economy "Standing on the Shoulder of Giants, An American Agenda for Educational Reform" by Marc S. Tucker compares teacher quality, teacher training and teacher social standing in the United States to that of teachers in top-scoring countries such as Canada, Finland, Singapore, Japan, and in Shanghai, China.

According to the study, none of these countries sets teacher pay based on student performance or test scores. None of these countries administers the number and types of computer-scored, multiple-choice tests that we use to grade student achievement, evaluate teacher quality, and measure general school success. In these countries, tests require students to actively show and apply their knowledge of the subject matter.

Teachers in these top-performing countries come from top-tier universities selected from the highest achievers in their classes. They receive comprehensive training in the craft of teaching while working with mentor teachers for extensive periods of time and are expected to be masters in their subject matter.

Nowhere in these countries can a teacher give instruction in a subject under emergency certification, as is so often the case in the U.S. I know that many specialty areas at American universities have tough admissions requirements; for example schools of pharmacy, engineering and nursing. Yet, those restrictions are not common in the colleges of education.

Why not? While teacher training in the United States has come a long way since my six

weeks of student teaching back in the 1970s, there are many avenues for entering the teaching profession with limited training or preparation. In many cases, these alternative methods of entering the teaching profession are held up as examples of innovation without any meaningful extensive research, supporting data or long-range studies to substantiate their effectiveness.

While other countries are also looking to the United States to see the results of our reforms, I wonder if we are looking at their successful models for innovative ideas that we could adopt. In my years of teaching dating back to 1974, I have seen reforms come and go without the promised results, discarded and forgotten. I have seen standardized tests adopted, purchased, and shortly thereafter disposed of.

Let's look at some strategies from top-performing countries and see what we can learn before charging ahead with untested and unproven reforms.

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