

## Organizing and Supporting Schools for High Performance

High performing schools are characterized by high levels of collaboration among teachers, focused on the common task of improving their schools and helping all of their students succeed. Teachers in these schools see their jobs as broadly including not only teaching their own students, but also improving instruction across their schools, sharing best practices with their peers, mentoring new teachers, learning from master teachers, working with their subject and grade level peers to coordinate instruction, and supporting all the students in their classes to succeed however they can. Specific ways of organizing these schools are necessary to facilitate these practices. These include:

- **Significant Non-Teaching Time:** Teachers have significant amounts of non-teaching time in the school day for planning, teacher development, teacher collaboration, and meetings with students and families.
- **Structures to Support Teacher Collaboration:** Regular weekly times are set for teachers to meet with peer and master teachers to improve teaching and learning, problem-solve specific issues in the classroom and the school, and to share best practices from their experience and from research.
- **Workspace for Teachers:** School building are designed to give teachers space to do their own work and to collaborate with other teachers.
- **Efficient Use of Learning Time:** School organize the day to ensure that learning time is productive, especially for at-risk students.
- **Staff Follow Students:** Class teachers or other school staff are assigned responsibility for ensuring the well-being of classes of students over school years.
- **Parent Engagement:** Schools develop a range of strategies to engage parents in supporting student learning.

Many of these jurisdictions make trade-offs to make these practices affordable, including larger class sizes, shared classrooms, and reduction in (or lack of) non-teaching responsibilities like coaching sports or monitoring lunch for teachers during the school day. Career ladder, compensation and appraisal systems underpin these practices.

What follows are some examples of these practices in high performing school systems.

Copyright© NCEE 2018

	International Examples	US examples
Significant Non-Teaching Time	Teachers teach far fewer hours each week in top performing countries than in the US. Teachers teach on average 11 hours a week in <i>Shanghai</i> , 17 hours a week in <i>Singapore</i> and <i>Hong Kong</i> , 20 hours per week in <i>Finland</i> , 21 hours per week in <i>British Columbia</i> compared with more than 26 hours per week in the <i>US</i> .	The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations supported a number of districts across the country to find additional time during the school day and year to support teacher development. One of the participating districts, <i>Bridgeport, Connecticut</i> , found 170 additional hours per teacher over the school year for teacher development, by reorganizing their school day around cross-disciplinary areas and forming teacher teams. <sup>1</sup>
Structures for Teacher Collaboration	<p>Non-teaching time is reserved for classroom-related work like planning lessons, grading and meeting with students, as well as teacher development and collaborative work to improve classroom teaching through lesson study and planning, sharing best practices, problem-solving classroom issues, and conducting and sharing research.</p> <p>Teachers typically meet a few hours each week in scheduled teacher meetings. In <i>Japan</i>, teachers spend 2 or 3 hours each week in lesson study groups. Lesson study is a model of teacher-led research in which a group of teachers work together to target a particular area for student learning. Using existing evidence, they collaboratively research plan, teach and observe a series of lessons, using ongoing discussion reflect and expert input to track and refine their interventions.<sup>2</sup> In <i>Shanghai</i>, teachers meet weekly in grade groups (<i>beikezu</i>) that focus on</p>	<p>In <i>Fresno, CA</i>, the district reorganized its schedule to allow teachers to meet one full day every 2-3 weeks for a full day of professional development and planning in subject groups.<sup>3</sup> A small set of schools in <i>Chicago, IL</i> has been doing regular lesson study groups, based on the Japanese model, with the support of the Lesson Study Alliance.<sup>4</sup> At Healy Elementary in <i>Somerville, MA</i>, the school created a weekly common planning time for each grade level, in addition to individual teacher planning time.<sup>5</sup></p> <p>See attached:</p>

	International Examples	US examples
	<p>lesson planning and in teaching research groups (<i>jiaoyanza</i>) that address curriculum, teaching and student learning.</p> <p>Time in these countries is also set aside for mentoring and induction programs for new teachers. In <i>Singapore</i> and <i>Shanghai</i>, new teachers and mentors have 2-3 hours per week of scheduled mentoring time. In <i>New Zealand</i>, new teachers are released one day each week for professional development and mentoring. There are also professional development workshops and courses for all teachers, up to 100 hours per year in <i>Singapore</i> and about 50 each year in <i>Shanghai</i>.</p> <p>Teachers are not typically assigned to non-teaching related activities, like monitoring lunchtime or recess or leading clubs or sports during the school day. In <i>Japan</i>, teachers are paid to work until 5 pm, about two hours after students leave the building to give them time for planning and meeting with other teachers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparison of typical Singapore teacher weekly schedule and typical Pennsylvania teacher schedule</li> </ul>
Teacher workspace	<p>In many high performing education systems, school buildings are designed to give teachers space to work and meet outside of class time. In <i>Shanghai</i>, all teachers have offices, and there are designated spaces for teacher meetings. Classrooms are where teachers go to teach students, not where they do their non-teaching work. The teacher offices are sometimes carrels in a shared space, which encourages collaboration and discussion.<sup>6</sup> In <i>Singapore</i>, all teachers have private carrels to do their work.<sup>7</sup></p>	<p>Classrooms in the <i>U.S.</i> are not typically designed with much focus on teacher workspaces although there are many examples of individual schools that have reconfigured space to do this.</p> <p>See attached:</p>

	International Examples	US examples
	In <i>Finland</i> , there are typically large teachers rooms with workspaces for each teacher as well as meeting rooms. <sup>8</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparison of typical Shanghai school floorplan and typical Pennsylvania school floorplan</li> </ul>
Efficient use of learning time	<p>School in top performing countries organizing learning time so that it is efficient, particularly for at-risk students.</p> <p><i>Ontario</i>, for example, requires 60 minute protected time each day for numeracy instruction for all students in grades 1-8, as part of a broad mathematics strategy. Primary schools with higher percentages of students who score low on provincial assessment are assigned up to three math lead teachers to work with teachers to design strategies to raise achievement and to provide additional staff support for students most in need. Structured study halls with math support teachers are also offered for students who need this, along with on-line homework support.<sup>9</sup> <i>Finland</i> also provides support teachers to work with small groups of students who are struggling in the classroom in all subjects to make sure that they are able to master the material presented in class.</p>	<p>In many <i>U.S.</i> school districts extended time for literacy and mathematics is a strategy for schools where students are struggling. <i>New Jersey</i>, for example, requires high need school districts to provide intensive literacy programs to students in preschool through grade 3<sup>10</sup>. <i>Massachusetts's</i> Expanded Learning Time Initiative provides funds to school to significantly expand the hours and days in their school schedules to enable each school to improve student achievement, as well as to motivate and engage students. The strategies include: 1) more instructional time in math, literacy, science and other core subjects to enable students to meet state standards; and 2) integrating enrichment and applied learning opportunities into the school day that complement and align with state standards and 21st century skills.<sup>11</sup></p>

	International Examples	US examples
Staff follow students	<p>Students in high performing schools often have a teacher or other school staff who has responsibility for their success in school over a period of years. In <i>Shanghai</i>, classes of students typically stay together over several years of schooling. A teacher, called <i>banzhuren</i>, is assigned to follow each class of students to make sure all students are supported, as needed, and is in touch with students' families. The <i>banzhuren</i> is released from teaching duties a certain number of hours a week to fulfill this role.<sup>12</sup> In <i>Finland and Japan</i>, classroom teachers teach a single class of students through several grades in primary school, and are responsible for each students' well-being over several years.<sup>13</sup></p>	<p>Public schools in the U.S. are generally not structured to allow teachers to follow students over a period of time, except in the case of private or charter schools that follow a mixed grade teaching model.</p>
Parent engagement	<p>Parents are seen as key to ensuring student success in school, and high performing schools engage them in different ways. In <i>Japan</i>, teachers send notebooks home to parents daily or weekly to update them on their child's progress. Parents can write back in the notebooks so there is an on-going dialogue. Teachers also make home visits to all students' families at the beginning of the school year and stay in touch over the course of the year, or several years in the case of home teachers.<sup>14</sup> <i>Ontario</i> offers small grants (Parent Reaching Out Grants) to school councils to fund activities designed to overcome barriers to increased parent engagement, including translation of school documents, creation of materials to explain school curriculum and initiatives to parents, funding transportation for parents who otherwise not be able to travel to the school to participate</p>	<p>The <i>Boston, Massachusetts</i> Public Schools (BPS) created school-based Family and Community Outreach Coordinator positions to help schools across the district increase family engagement. BPS also developed a credit-bearing professional development course for teachers to introduce them to research on family engagement and help them strategize how to use these ideas in their own school. The focus is on linking family engagement to the school's own instructional strategy. BPS also launched Parent University, which runs workshops</p>

	International Examples	US examples
	<p>in events, and creating programs for parents who are new to the school.<sup>15</sup> <i>New Zealand</i> has prioritized building parents engagement in schools serving its minority Maori population in particular, with funding available to create parent centers at the schools to teach parents how to help their children succeed academically.<sup>16</sup></p>	<p>to train parents on effective practices for engaging in their child’s education.<sup>17</sup></p>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.schoolbydesign.com/assets/docs/bridgeport%20card%20-%206%20-%20SINGLE%20PAGES.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/10/lesson-study-japanese-str\\_n\\_1197229.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/10/lesson-study-japanese-str_n_1197229.html)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.schoolbydesign.com/assets/docs/fresno%20card%20-%209%20-%20SINGLE%20PAGES.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.lsalliance.org>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/dsac/plc/module-2-structures-of-plcs.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Forthcoming publication: Empowering Educators: Shanghai case study

<sup>7</sup> NISL Singapore Study trip report, 2016

<sup>8</sup> Conversation with Pasi Sahlberg, February 2017.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/excellent.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.state.nj.us/education/code/current/title6a/chap13.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/redesign/elt/>

<sup>12</sup> Forthcoming publication: Empowering Educators: Shanghai case study

<sup>13</sup> <http://ncee.org/what-we-do/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/japan-overview/japan-instructional-systems/>; <http://ncee.org/what-we-do/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/finland-overview/finland-instructional-systems/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://ncee.org/what-we-do/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/japan-overview/japan-system-and-school-organization/>

---

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/reaching.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Principles/Community-engagement/About>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>