

What makes quality public education? Ask the experts. That's what the education union did.

Public education can be done right. To find the best solutions, the California Federation of Teachers sought U.S. experts in successful research-based methods and an expert from Finland, a country with one of the highest performing school systems in the world. The three experts are **Diane Ravitch**, Former Assistant Secretary of Education in the George H.W. Bush Administration; **Linda Darling-Hammond**, Chief Education Advisor to the Barack Obama presidential campaign in 2008; **Pasi Sahlberg**, Director at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

Diane Ravitch

The education researcher who changed course and national attitudes

Diane Ravitch wrote *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, the 2010 book that sent shock waves through the school reform establishment. In her own words, Ravitch had “long been allied with conservative scholars and organizations.”



Ravitch was a high-ranking official in the Department of Education during the first Bush Administration. She was present at government meetings and think tank discussions where the building blocks of the contemporary “school reform” movement were formulated: market-based competition, so-called school choice, and test-based accountability.

Gradually Ravitch realized these building blocks were based on conservative ideology and not on sound education research and best practices. Her book is a scathing critique of current school reform made more powerful because she was there when the ideas were conceived.

Ravitch asks why the United States is closing “failing schools” and replacing them with private management, often reopening them as charter schools.

“Public schools are a public good, like parks and police. We should not close and open them as if they were shoe stores.”

Members of the legitimate education community point to the fact that unresolved issues of poverty account for much of low school achievement. In response, Ravitch says the self-styled reformers accuse educators of “making excuses,” “being afraid of accountability” and “defending the status quo.”

“The influence of family income dwarfs that of teacher and school. Poverty is the root of low performance. Family income is the most reliable predictor of test scores. We lead the world in child poverty. And there is no accountability for the Legislature, only for teachers. The testing and accountability we hear about every day are status quo. The status quo has failed.”

When the legitimate education community expresses dismay with scientifically indefensible ideas such as merit pay and using student test scores to evaluate teachers, Ravitch says they are accused of being obstructionists.

“Merit pay is the idea that never works and never dies. Studies by the National Center on Performance Incentives show that when districts tried increasing merit pay, it didn’t work. The reformers believe in carrots and sticks that are always tied to test scores. They forget that tests measure student performance, not teacher performance. Tests should always be used for the purpose for which they are designed.”

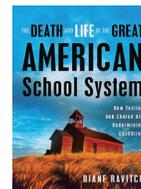
In a report titled *Incentives and Test-based Accountability in Education*, the National Research Council concludes that the current testing and accountability model, the “status quo” as Ravitch calls it, has not led to improved

student achievement and instead has resulted in a damaging narrowing of the curriculum. Ravitch echoes these concerns.

“The most important outcomes of education can’t be measured: love of learning, character, compassion, courage, integrity, asking the right question, and civic responsibility.”

Source: Diane Ravitch speech of January 18, 2012, presented in San Francisco at a public event hosted by United Educators of San Francisco and co-sponsored by the California Federation of Teachers.

Diane Ravitch is the author of *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*.



Linda Darling-Hammond

Research-based solutions are essential to create real change

Stanford University’s Linda Darling-Hammond believes the teaching profession must be the advocate for research-based school change. Darling-Hammond was the education advisor for President Obama’s presidential campaign in 2008, and co-chaired the transition team for California State Superintendent of Instruction Tom Torlakson, as well as his Educator Excellence Task Force that developed the new, research-based “roadmap” for state education policy, *Greatness by Design*.



The *Greatness by Design* document has been criticized because it details the flaws in Value-Added Methodology, the method of teacher evaluation that uses student test data currently being promoted by self-styled education reformers. Darling-Hammond wants to see the creation of a valid, research-based teacher evaluation system.

“There are good ways to build the teaching profession and there are bad ways. So much of the discourse is about getting rid of teachers, when instead we need to be creating policies that support the development of expertise.”

Darling-Hammond insists that the qualities of a fair and rigorous teacher evaluation system be grounded in high-quality, research-based standards.

“These qualities are embedded in the National Board Standards and the California Standards for the Teaching profession. There is evidence that if we use this type of evaluation, learning results are better. And at the end of the day, there would be multi-faceted evidence about the effectiveness of a teacher. Then we need to integrate

these systems, think about it as a whole, so our children can benefit.”

Darling-Hammond pointed to two AFT local unions that were instrumental in bringing Peer Assistance and Review, a program that uses veteran, mentor teachers to support their peers in developing expertise, to California. She cited the Poway Federation of Teachers as a model program and credited United Educators of San Francisco for successfully negotiating funding for mentor teachers so teachers can get extra help.

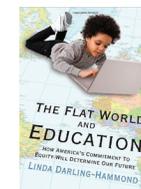
“These programs allow the system to improve and allow us to make decisions in a way that makes sense.”

In her book, *The Flat World and Education*, Darling-Hammond analyzes high-performing school systems in the world and what allows their students to achieve top scores on international assessments while U.S. students score in only the middle rankings. She says that school reform efforts in this country bear little resemblance to those in high-performing systems. The things that matter for teacher success, Darling-Hammond says, are resources, class size, mentoring, and collaboration.

“We have to do what Finland does. They don’t want to build competition; collaboration is what they want. In Finland, they don’t talk about getting rid of bad teachers; they talk about how they can help their colleagues improve. You can’t fire your way to Finland.”

Source: Linda Darling-Hammond speech of February 3, 2012, presented at the EC/K-12 Conference in Oakland sponsored by the California Federation of Teachers.

Linda Darling-Hammond is the author of *The Flat World and Education: How America’s Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future*.



Pasi Sahlberg

How Finland built the best public education system in the world



Finland has revolutionized its public education system by focusing on support and respect for educators and de-emphasizing testing. In so doing, Finland has created one of the highest performing education systems in the world.

Pasi Sahlberg, a director at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, and author of *Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland*, tells what it takes for a nation to build a high-performing system of public education.

"In Finland, education is considered a basic human right. All Finnish schools are publicly funded. We have no charters. We have no private schools. It is against the law to charge fees for education in my country. Education is never an issue in elections. No candidates mention education, except to say that education and healthcare will remain a human right for everyone."

Contemporary school reform in the United States has focused on increased standardized testing. Education experts, including Diane Ravitch and the National Research Council, have concluded that the concentration on testing has narrowed the curriculum. As a result, many schools have eliminated instruction in non-tested areas of study such as art and music. Not so in Finland.

"Finns believe that every child is different, that we all learn at a different pace. We don't have grade level standards. We don't have national standards and every school is responsible for planning its own curriculum. We are increasing time for music, drama and arts, and taking away from subjects like math and reading. It is not remembering things, but creativity that will bring innovation to our nation. We do a lot of assessment but it is mostly done by schools and teachers themselves. We don't believe standardized testing will improve education. The less we test our students, the more they learn. Our whole testing budget is \$1 million and we spend \$70 million on professional development."

Sahlberg says that Finland's national focus on educational and economic equity has been the foundation of the successes in his country.

"Every family has a right to municipal day care for a 0-6 year old. There is one year of preschool at age 6. Compulsory school starts at age 7. Children stay in school nine years. High school has academic and vocational streams. Students study 14 or 15 different subjects. At age 16, students are free to do what they want. We provide 65 percent of our students free university. We have the least number of instructional hours of all countries. We have less time to teach and more time to cooperate with other teachers. Every school has a nurse, psychologist, and doctor. A new law says every student has to go through a comprehensive medical check, including dental care."

Some people may think that Finnish-style education policy would not work in the United States because such intense public sector support for children, families, and schools would result in prohibitively high taxes, but that is not the case in Finland.

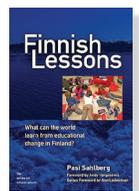
"There is a misconception that we have extremely high taxation. We have a progressive taxation. If your income is high, then you pay more taxes. The corporate tax payment is 26 percent."

Even so, some people suggest that Finland's "European-style social democracy" would inhibit a nation's economic competitiveness. Yet according to the World Economic Forum, that is not the case. The Forum's 2012 annual report ranks Finland as the world's second most competitive economy, with the United States ranked seventh, having fallen two places in 2011.

What's more, the Forum cites Finland's education system, with its cradle to university supports, lack of standardized testing, and wrap-around health care as central to Finland being amongst the world's most innovative economies.

Source: Pasi Sahlberg speech of February 17, 2012, presented in San Francisco at a public event sponsored by United Educators of San Francisco.

Pasi Sahlberg is the author of *Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?*



Educators know and care

Teachers and their unions are essential partners in achieving quality public education

The three education experts — Diane Ravitch, Linda Darling-Hammond and Pasi Sahlberg — present an analysis of contemporary education reform, a prescription for what should be happening now, and a vision of what education might look like in the future if the United States embraced a progressive agenda in the education, economic, and social service sectors.

The three experts share a common view about one important mechanism necessary to carry out the urgent solutions needed: **Education unions.**

Diane Ravitch warns about the agendas of the self-styled reformers and their opportunistic partners who are attempting to harvest public dollars for private coffers.

“Right-wing reformers count on big foundations, like Gates, Broad, and Walton, with huge amounts of money to promote vouchers and charters because they want to destroy teacher unions. Their free market model produces winners and losers, never equality.”

Pasi Sahlberg focuses on the importance of the teachers’ union in Finland and the central role played by the union in school success.

“We have one very strong union for teachers, the Trade Union of Education in Finland. More than 95 percent of educators belong to the union.... Without the union, we really cannot implement anything. Its role is securing and protecting the rights of teachers, and providing professional development for teachers. It’s a very important part of the system.”

And finally, Linda Darling-Hammond says the professionals hold the key to success.

“We need the union of professionals to step up and say that we care about how our profession will be treated.”

The California Federation of Teachers is that “Union of Professionals.” Educator members of the CFT care and know how our profession must be treated if quality public education that brings equal opportunity to all children is to succeed in California.

**Want to know what works in the classroom?
Ask the experts. That’s what the education union did
Public education can be done right..**