

Should america adopt  
an educational  
system more like  
finland's?



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## Research Outline/Argument Plan

1. Position Statement: America absolutely should adopt an educational system more like Finland's.
2. Rhetorical situation: (Writer. Purpose. Audience. Question. Context)  
Writer: Shaniqua Harris, Age: 26, Gender: Female. Purpose: My purpose for writing this research argument is to inform and educate my audience of the benefits of adopting a European educational system.  
Audience: I would like to appeal to high school students those fourteen to eighteen years old as well as their parents. Question: Should America adopt an educational system more like Finland's? Context: American's poor test scores and the Finnish being better prepared for life after school and to find work.
3. Audience analysis: (determine who the target audience for your argument is.) My anticipated audience again would be high schoolers ages fourteen to eighteen years old and their parents. I would anticipate their needs and interests to all center around money and in order to make money being better prepared and ready for the workforce is a must.
4. Claim: (similar to a thesis statement, this is the claim you will make with this paper.) As a current student and parent of a child who has just entered into America's education system, I believe that America can benefit greatly by following Finland's lead of reforming the education system because of their holistic teaching philosophies and logical methods.

5. Reasons: (these are the points you will make to support your claim and convince your audience.) Finland's educational system better prepares the students for life beyond college and the job competition in a global economy, whereas America's educational system prepares the student for college. Finland considers that after the completion of high school that not all students want to attend college, or university as they call it and offer a " dual system. The dual system is a branch of education that a student can choose after completion of the ninth or tenth grade or later that consists of a three-year apprenticeship in business or industry coupled with theoretical studies in a School for Pre-Professional Specialization and Further Development usually twice a week, for students who choose to forgo college.
6. Challenges: Implementing change
7. Objection/Rebuttal: America is not in need of an education reform because it is not a teaching issue but instead a poverty issue
8. Solution: Integrate changes to educational system gradually
9. Rogerian or Toulmin Model: Toulmin Model

Why do people seek education in America? Although, home to some of the top universities in the world America's education system needs to be reformed. American students repeatedly rank near the middle or bottom among industrialized nations when it comes to academic performance. The modern-day education system we use today in America was invented by Horace Mann, who advocated for a planned and established curriculum of fundamental knowledge for each student. He established six principles regarding education, separated grades by age, and believed lecturing would

be better suited for learning some of these ideals still being used today. Over time many other states began to adopt Mann's principles leading to the education system as we know it today. America's education system is past due for a change with many of its public and private schools still operating on the same out-of-date systems and agendas established by Mann. It is time we take a look across the Atlantic at some of the training systems that are outperforming America, specifically Finland's. Finland over the years has introduced several innovative and modest changes that have wholly transformed their educational system and has been consistently ranked number one in global education. They are leading the way because of logical methods and a comprehensive teaching atmosphere that aims for fairness over superiority. As a current student and parent of a child who has just entered into America's education system, I believe that America can benefit greatly by following Finland's lead of reforming the education system because of their holistic teaching philosophies and logical methods.

In America, standardized testing is the way students are tested for subject understanding. Students are expected to fill in circles on a scantron, answering the same questions given to students prior and this is used to determine whether a student has mastered the subject. In reality, this creates a situation the student will either learn to cram or retain the information just long enough to pass the test and teachers who are teaching with only the intent of students passing a test that is connected to their salary. Learning is essentially absent. However, in Finland, there are no standardized tests, beyond the National Matriculation Exam, which is a voluntary test for students at the end of upper-secondary school. All children

in Finland are graded on an individualized basis and grading system that is set by their teacher.

Finland requires that all teachers have a master's degree before entering the profession. The teaching programs in Finland are the most strict and judicious professional schools in the entire country, with primary education being the most competitive degree to obtain with the elementary department admitting only ten percent of applicants and dismissing thousands more yearly. To become a primary teacher the individual not only has to be the finest and brilliant but must also pass a sequence of interviews and personality screenings to get in. It is essential that they have the natural ability and drive to teach, it is not something that can be taught, you either have it or you don't. Finland understands that the ability to teach isn't something that can be gained from studying. It is usually a gift and passion. The bar is set so high for the teachers that there is no reason to have such a strict grading system for teachers, like in America. " There is no word for accountability in Finnish...Accountability is something that is left when responsibility is subtracted." Pasi Sahlberg director of the Finnish Ministry of Education and writer of *Finnish Lessons: What can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* America's teachers' educational backgrounds differ, with some having certificates and others having degrees, associate bachelors, masters, Ph. D. or doctorate. Some teachers not even having a background, the degree in teaching or passion for teaching. The bar is set low and most often as stated above teachers are teaching not so that the student will retain the knowledge, but instead so that the student can

perform well on these standardized tests that generally provide money for the school and is connected to their pay as well.

Another small, but effective change America can benefit from would be allowing students to begin school at an older age. In Finland, school age starts at seven to allow kids to be just that, kids during the developmental years. Compare that to America where school age starts anywhere from three to four years old. The children in Finland are beginning school when they are developmentally ready to grasp and concentrate.

Finland offers professional selections beyond a traditional college degree as well. America's current education system as it is currently is at a standstill and inflexible. The students go from teacher to teacher with each grade preparing for the next and then leading to college, which then leads to either more college or the workforce. Finland understands that not all students want to attend college searching for their purpose within a major, get a degree, and acquire large amounts of debt. The children in Finland are only obligated to attend school for nine years and everything after ninth grade or sixteen years old is voluntary. Although it is in a few high schools in the country (I personally only know of one), Finland offers a dual system. The dual system offers upper secondary school, a three-year program that equips students for the Matriculation Test that governs their admission into a University generally depending on specialisms acquired in high school. Then there is the vocational education option for those who choose to forgo university. This is also a three-year program that trains students for different career options. Students choosing to go this route also have the option of taking the Matriculation test if they too want to apply to University.

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The Finns allow for less strenuous school days and later start times as well. American school days begin anywhere from 7: 45 am to 8: 45 am. The students in Finland usually start school anywhere from 9 to 9: 45 am with some classes starting a bit earlier. Research has shown that early start times and lack of sleep has been linked with detrimental outcomes in numerous facets of students' lives such as poor mental health such as depression/depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts, poor physical health, behavioral problems such as bullying, violence-related behaviors, and physical fighting and poor academic performance.

In Finland, there is reliable education from the same teachers. Students often have the same teachers for up to six years and this is because there are fewer teachers and students in the schools. During the time they are together, it is easier to establish a bond, trust, and respect for one another. Teachers are also able to better pinpoint and accommodate a child and their individual learning style. They can precisely plan and care for the students' progress and help them reach their goals. The child will not be a " problem" that another teacher has to deal with or " fix" next year because they are there is no teacher to send them to for the following year. In America I have seen this thought process in action, because one teacher does not know how to deal with the student or has no idea of how to accommodate the child's way of learning they keep them back or pass them along knowing that they (the student) won't be their " problem" to fix. This is a poor way of thinking and again proves why Finland's education system is so much greater than ours. Teachers of America don't think of ways to adapt the lesson plans to all the students and their learning styles. Instead, it is centered around one type

of student with one type of learning style and if a child does not fit into the idea or box then they are the issue and not the assembly line antiquated education system that both the student and teacher must abide by.

Less homework and outside work are required in Finland. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), Finland has the least amount of homework and outside world than any other student in the world, doing only a half an hour of school work a night. Finnish students are getting everything they need to get done in school without the additional burdens that come with excelling at a subject and without having to be concerned about grades and busy-work.

Some may argue that America's education system is just fine as is and not in need of reform, however, test scores and the disturbing educational gaps that endure across racial-ethnic and income groups tell another story. Some teachers in America argue that the test scores are not a result of teaching, but instead because of poverty. Finland focuses on making the basics a priority using education as a tool to balance out inequality. Various school systems are so focused on increasing test scores they forget what makes for a peaceful, balanced, healthy student, and learning environment. Since the 1980s it has been a priority of Finnish educators to get back to basics. They believe all students should receive free school meals, access to healthcare is easily accessible, psychological counseling should be a provided option, and instruction should be curated particularly for that specific student.

In conclusion, if over time we integrate changes the current education system, then we will undoubtedly benefit from a system similar or identical

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to Finland's. Test scores will rise, students will be more focused, and teachers will be less stressed and more qualified. It is important to try and implement some of their ideas and philosophies when it comes to education into the current system to avoid and eliminate the use of the robotic and rigid assembly line systems, we use today are producing poorly prepared workers and adults who lack direction. Beginning with the individual in a collective environment of equality is Finland's way, the Finnish are not breeding an environment of competition, but cooperation. Finland outperforms cultures that have an unhealthy school-to-life balance without unwanted and needless stress, focusing on the true task at hand, which is learning and growing as a human being.

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