



FINNISH NATIONAL  
BOARD OF EDUCATION

# Basic Education Reform in Finland – How to develop the top ranked education system?

*Building Blocks for Education:  
Whole System Reform*

**September 13–14, 2010 • Toronto, Canada**

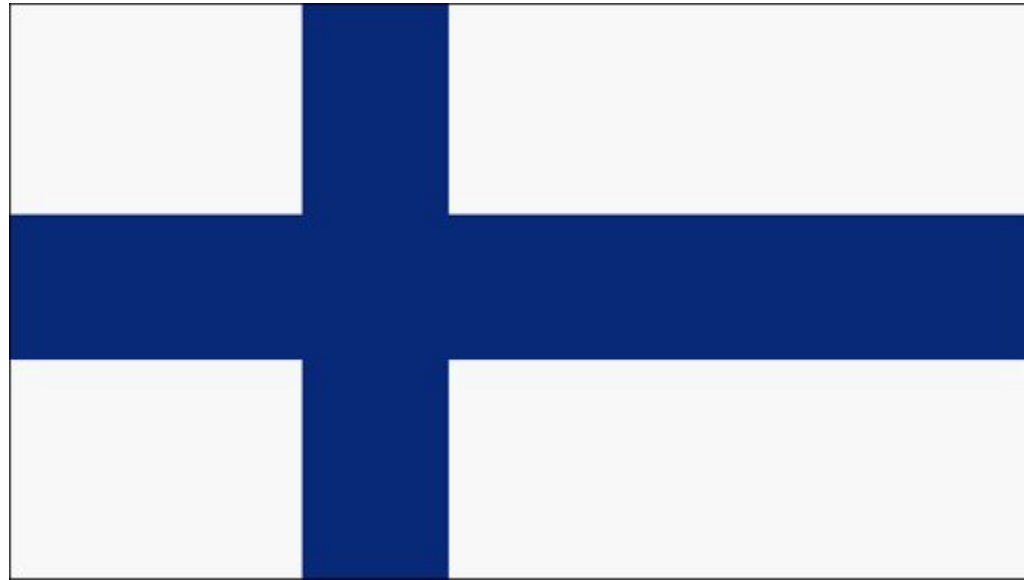
**Timo Lankinen**

**Director-General**

**Finnish National Board of Education**



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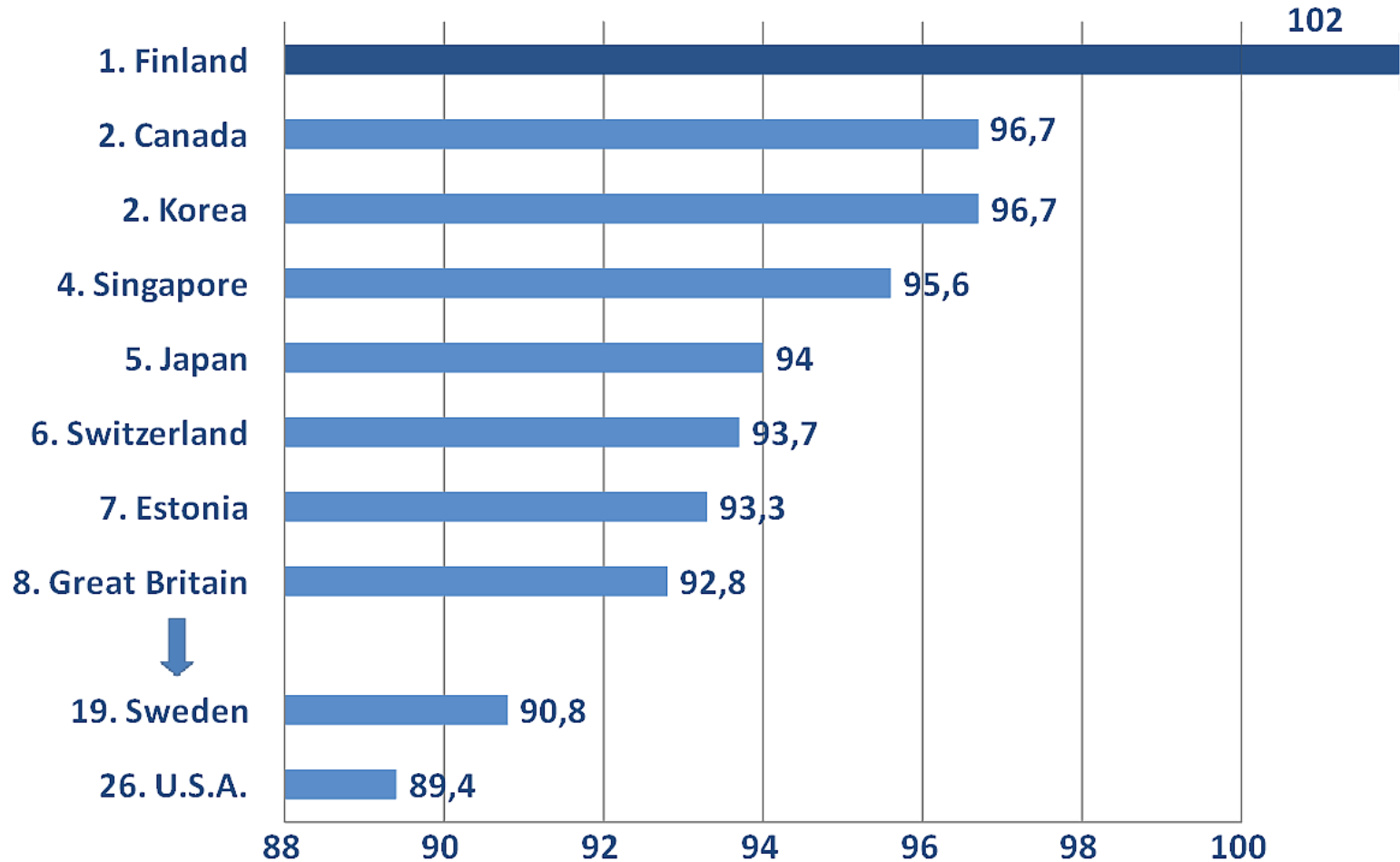
Finland is a pretty great place to be  
—the best, actually

(**Newsweek** - 16 Aug, 2010)



# Best education in the world

- even better than possible...



Source: Newsweek (Aug.  
2010)

Max. 100



## Why Finland is #1 ?

*“Finland's schoolkids enjoy a laid-back and inclusive learning environment where shoes are optional, all teachers have master's degrees, and extra help is the norm: every year about one in three students gets individual time with a tutor” (Newsweek)*

# Finland: A Small Nordic Welfare State

## History

Over 600 years a part of Sweden, and 100 years part of Russia  
Independence in 1917, Member of the European Union 1995

## Geography

304,000 km<sup>2</sup>, 188,000 lakes, 76,000 islands

## Population

5.33 million, Finnish and Swedish as official national languages

## Religion

Lutheran (79,7%), Orthodox (1.1%), others (1.3%), no religious affiliation (17,7%)

## Income

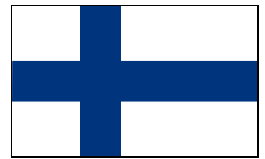
GDP (PPP) per capita \$ 33,556

## Society

Traditionally homogenous, isolated and closed  
Even income distribution, low class distinctions  
Large public sector providing extensive safety nets

## Culture

Straight-forward, no-nonsense, adaptive culture  
Trusting and co-operative, high cohesiveness and morals  
Tendency for consensus-driven decision making





## Two strong sectors of industries Extensive public & nascent private services

- The world's most forest-dependent country (pulp, paper, other wood products, machinery, chemicals, consulting)
- The world's most ICT-dependent country (especially communications equipment but also ICT at large)
- Both industries in turmoil - major industrial transformation ahead
- Despite considerable progress, Finland still has underdeveloped private services



# More Finnish schools in headlines

## **Why do Finland's schools get the best results?**

BBC News - 7 Apr, 2010

## **Why Finland is best for education?**

Times Online – 8 Aug, 2009

## **Top of the class**

The Economist – 26 June, 2008

## **What Makes Finnish Kids So Smart?**

The Wall Street Journal – 29 Feb, 2008

## **Focus on Schools Helps Finns Build a Showcase Nation**

Washington Post - 24 May, 2005



## Three best performing countries in PISA 2000-2006

2000*	2003	2006
MATH		
Japan 557	Hong Kong (China) 550	Taipei (China) 549
Korea 547	<b>Finland 544</b>	<b>Finland 548</b>
New Zealand 537	Korea 542	Hong Kong/Korea 547
READING		
<b>Finland 546</b>	<b>Finland 543</b>	Korea 556
Canada 534	Korea 534	<b>Finland 547</b>
New Zealand 529	Canada 528	Hong Kong 536
SCIENCE		
Korea 552	<b>Finland/Japan 548</b>	<b>Finland 563</b>
Japan 550	Hong Kong 539	Hong Kong 542
<b>Finland 538</b>	Korea 538	Canada 534

\* In 2000, Finland ranked 4th in math with 536





# School-level variance and explained variance in science performance, by country

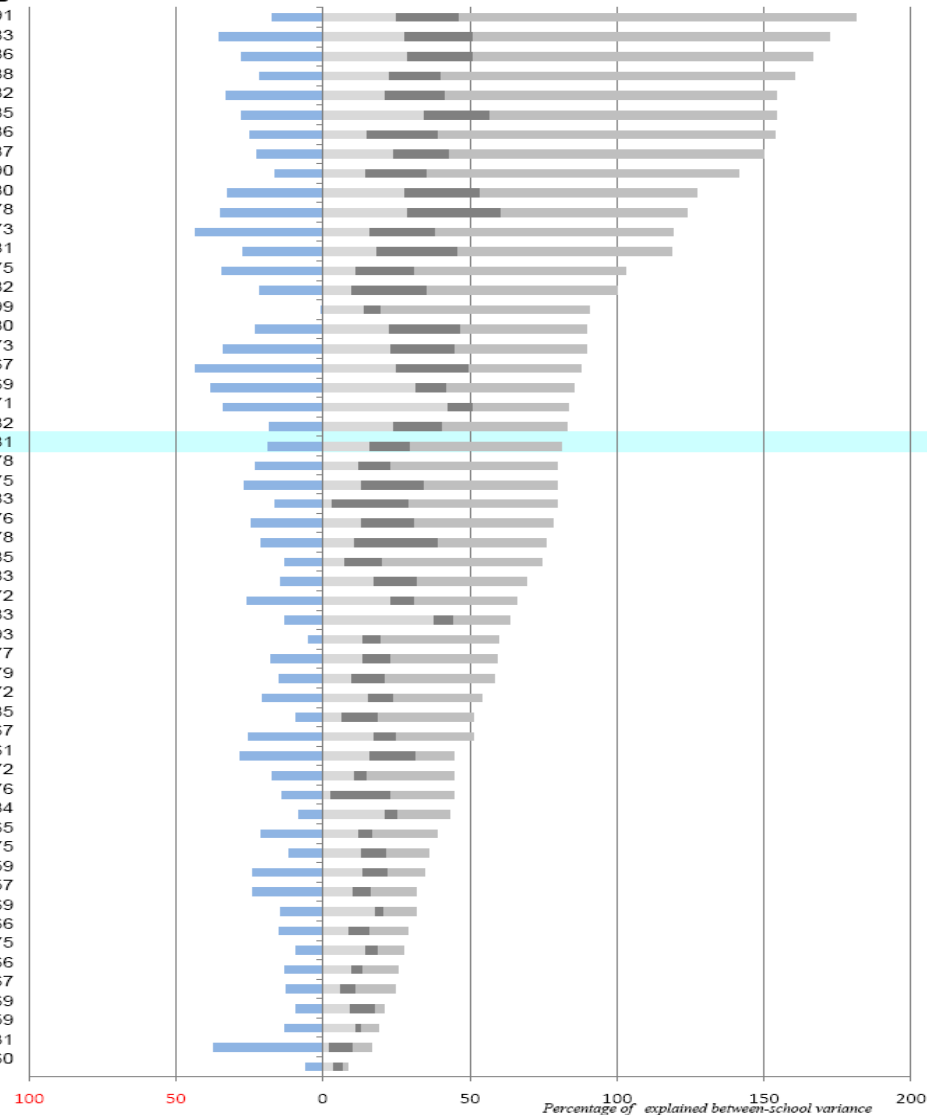
Less than 10 % of the variation in student performance was explained by the student background in Finland.

Less than 5 % of the overall performance variation among OECD countries lay between schools



	A	B
Germany	57	91
Bulgaria	54	83
Slovenia	60	86
Hungary	61	88
Czech Republic	53	82
Austria	55	85
Netherlands	60	86
Belgium	52	87
Chile	50	90
Argentina	48	80
Italy	50	78
Japan	47	73
Greece	47	81
Chinese Taipei	47	75
Turkey	53	82
Luxembourg	30	99
Switzerland	36	80
Slovak Republic	42	73
Israel	31	67
Brazil	47	69
Uruguay	40	71
Croatia	40	82
OECD average	33	81
Serbia	41	78
Romania	49	75
Korea	35	83
Hong Kong-China	37	76
Tunisia	42	78
United States	24	85
Portugal	32	83
Kyrgyzstan	39	72
Thailand	37	83
New Zealand	17	93
Lithuania	28	77
United Kingdom	20	79
Colombia	30	72
Montenegro	28	85
Mexico	40	67
Russian Federation	27	61
Australia	18	72
Macao-China	26	76
Ireland	17	84
Jordan	23	65
Estonia	21	75
Indonesia	43	59
Canada	19	57
Denmark	16	69
Latvia	19	66
Sweden	12	75
Spain	15	66
Poland	14	67
Iceland	9	69
Norway	11	59
Azerbaijan	50	31
Finland	6	60

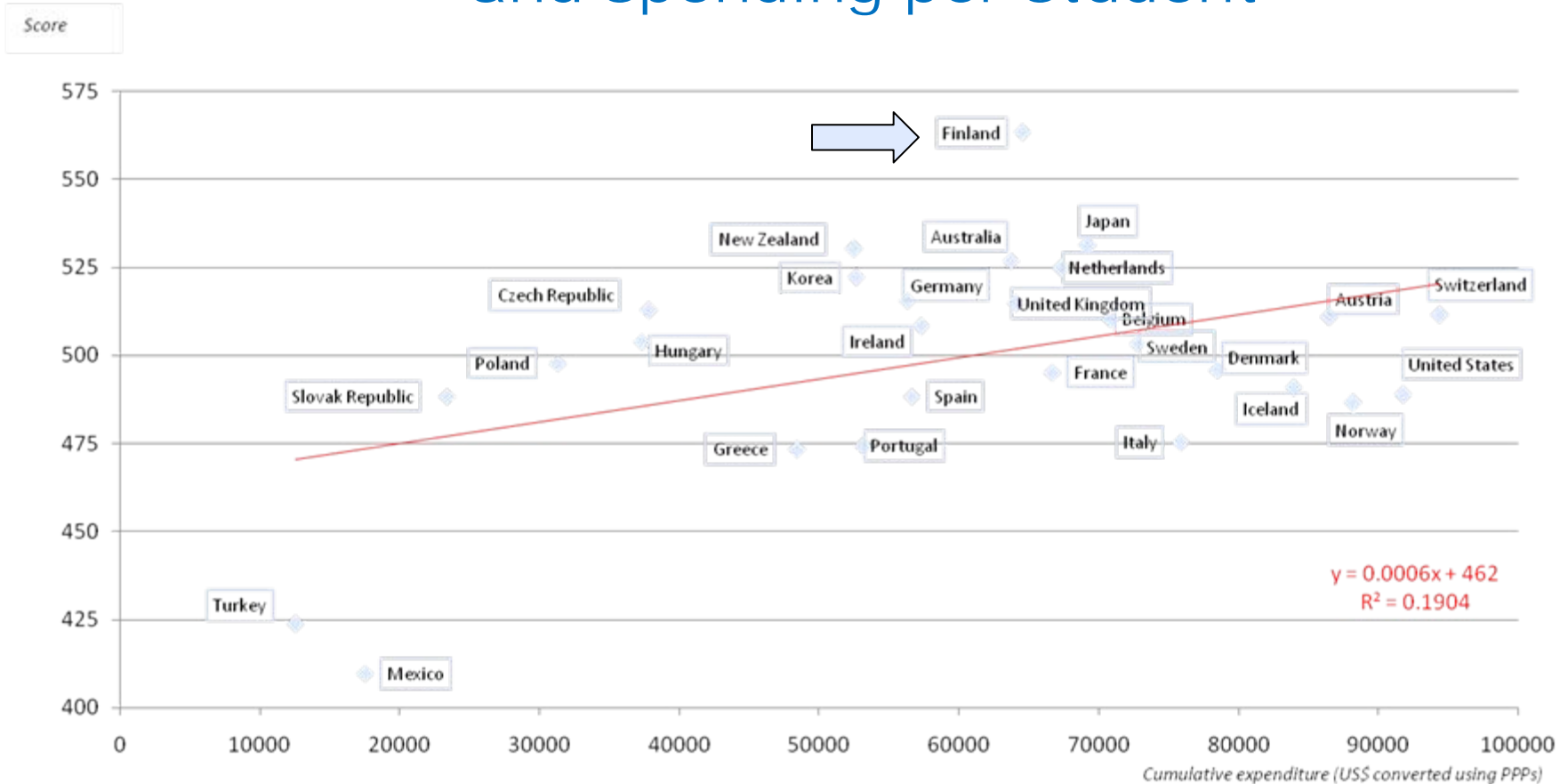
- Between-school variance uniquely accounted for by demographic and socio-economic factors
- Between-school variance uniquely accounted for by school factors
- Between-school variance jointly accounted for by demographic and socio-economic factors and school factors
- Unaccounted between-school variance



Source: Pisa 2006, Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World



# Student performance on the science scale and spending per student



Source: OECD PISA database 2006, Tables 2.1c and 2.6



Compulsory education starts late (age 7)  
and the school days are relatively short,  
which leads to the lowest instruction time  
within the OECD

### Average annual intended instruction time in public schools(2006)

	Age 7-8	Age 9-11	Age 12-14
Finland	608	683	829
OECD average	796	839	933

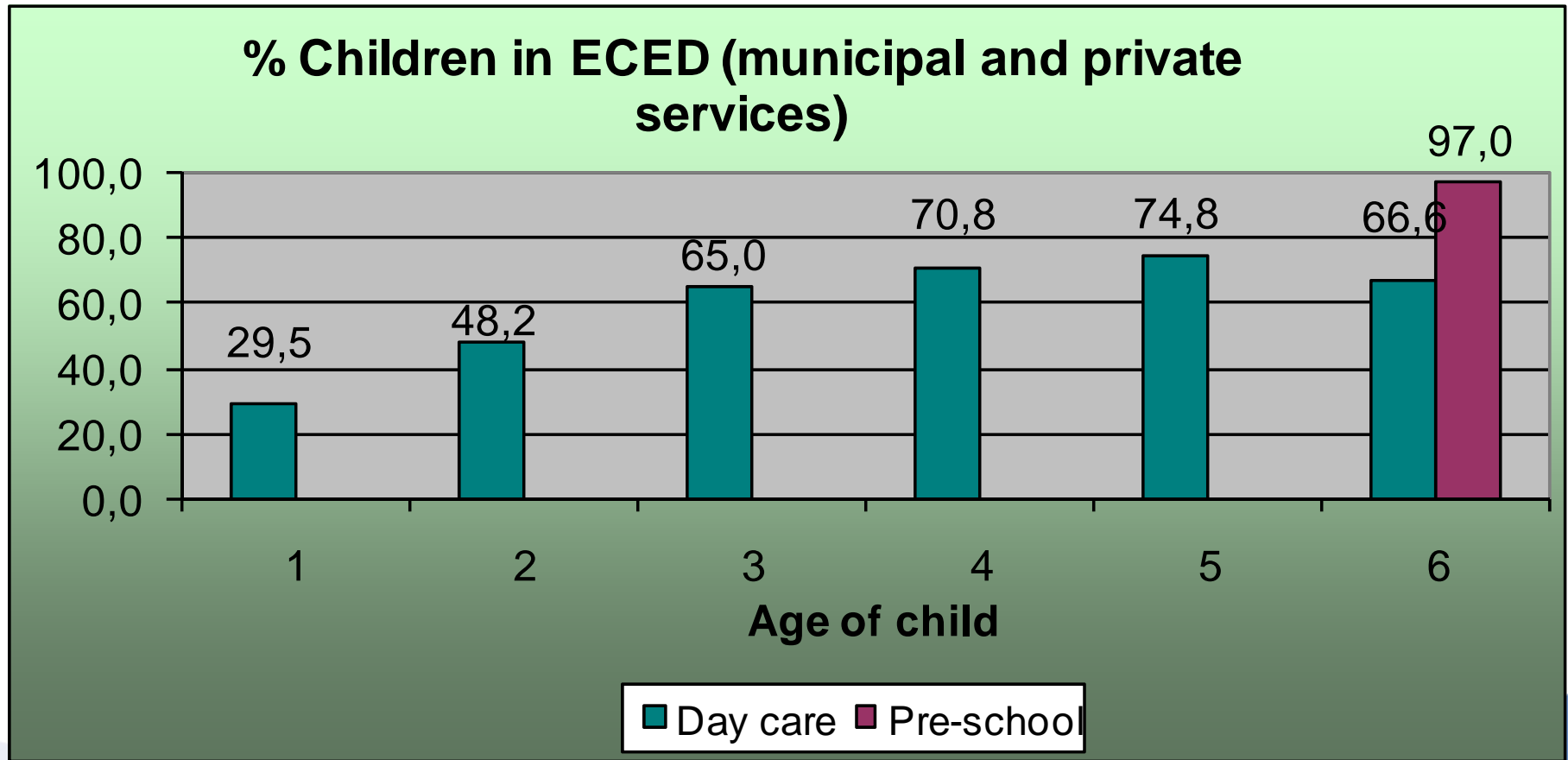
Source: OECD Education at a Glance 2008



# Participation in early childhood education

Day care and pre-school

Source: Stakes



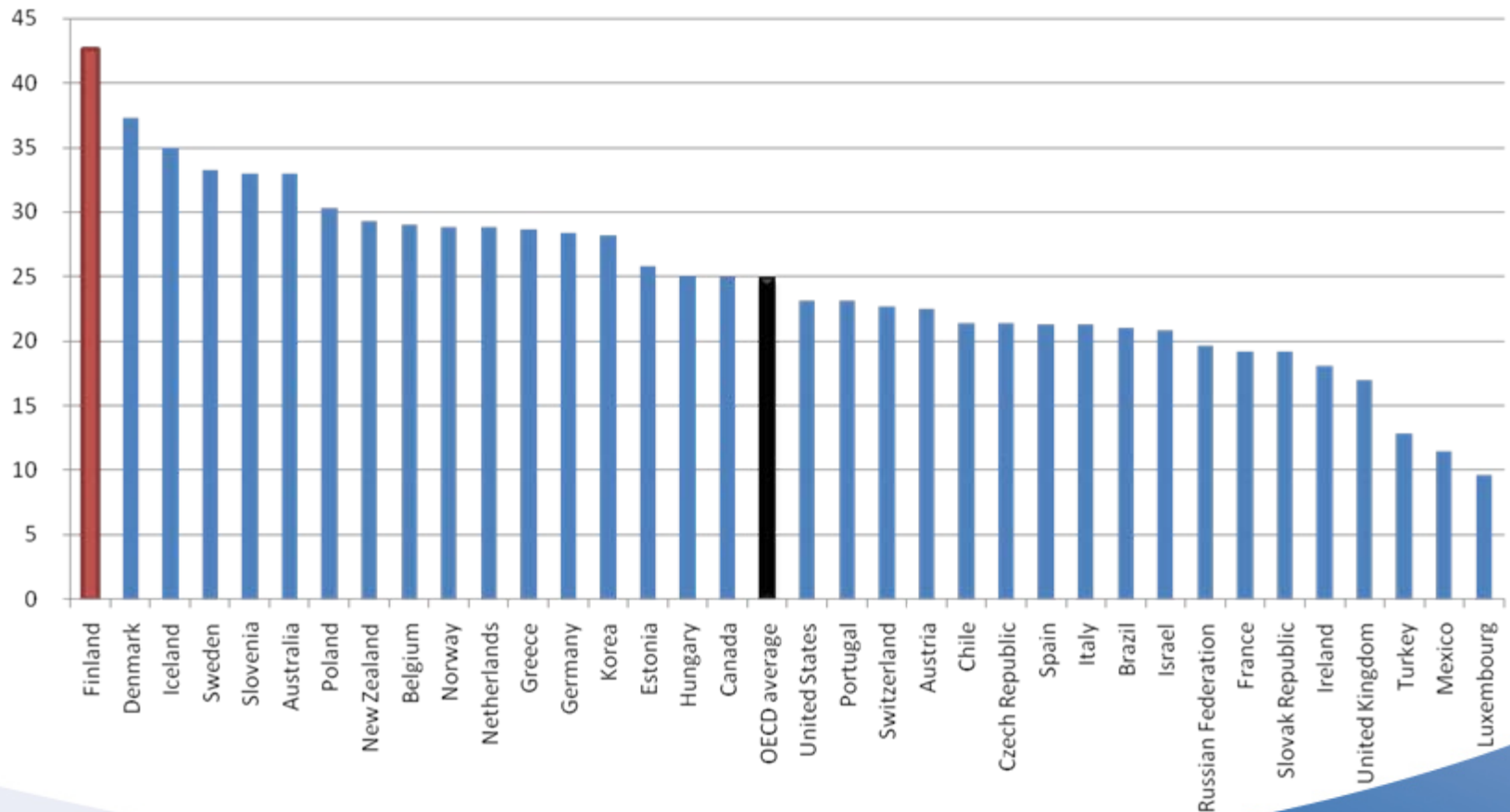


# Core contents in pre-school education

- Play
- Language and interaction
- Mathematics
- Ethics and way of thinking
- Environment and natural history
- Health
- Physical and motoric development
- Arts and culture



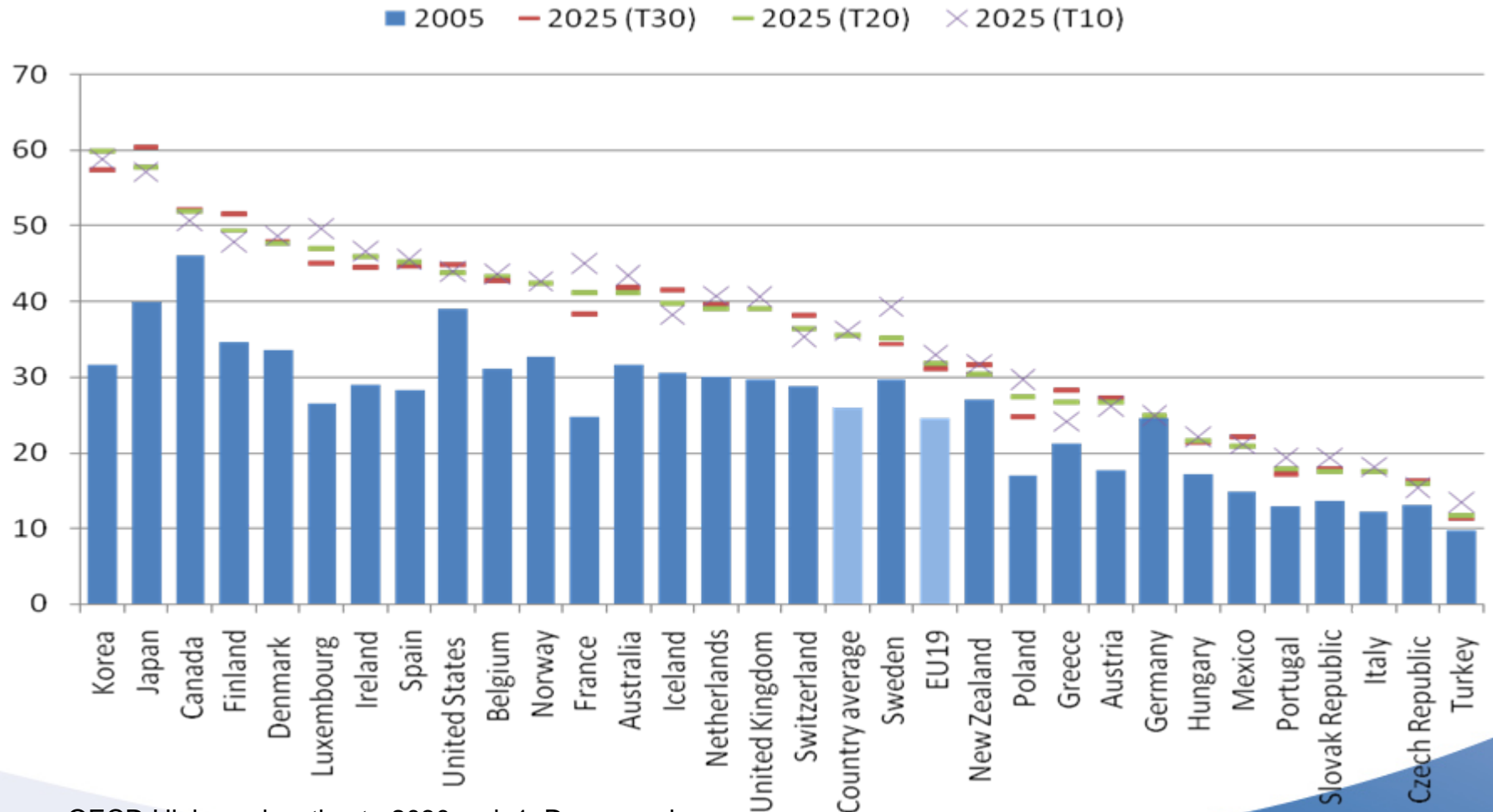
## Enrolment rates among 20-29 year-olds of the population aged 20 to 29 in 2008



Source: Education at a Glance 2010



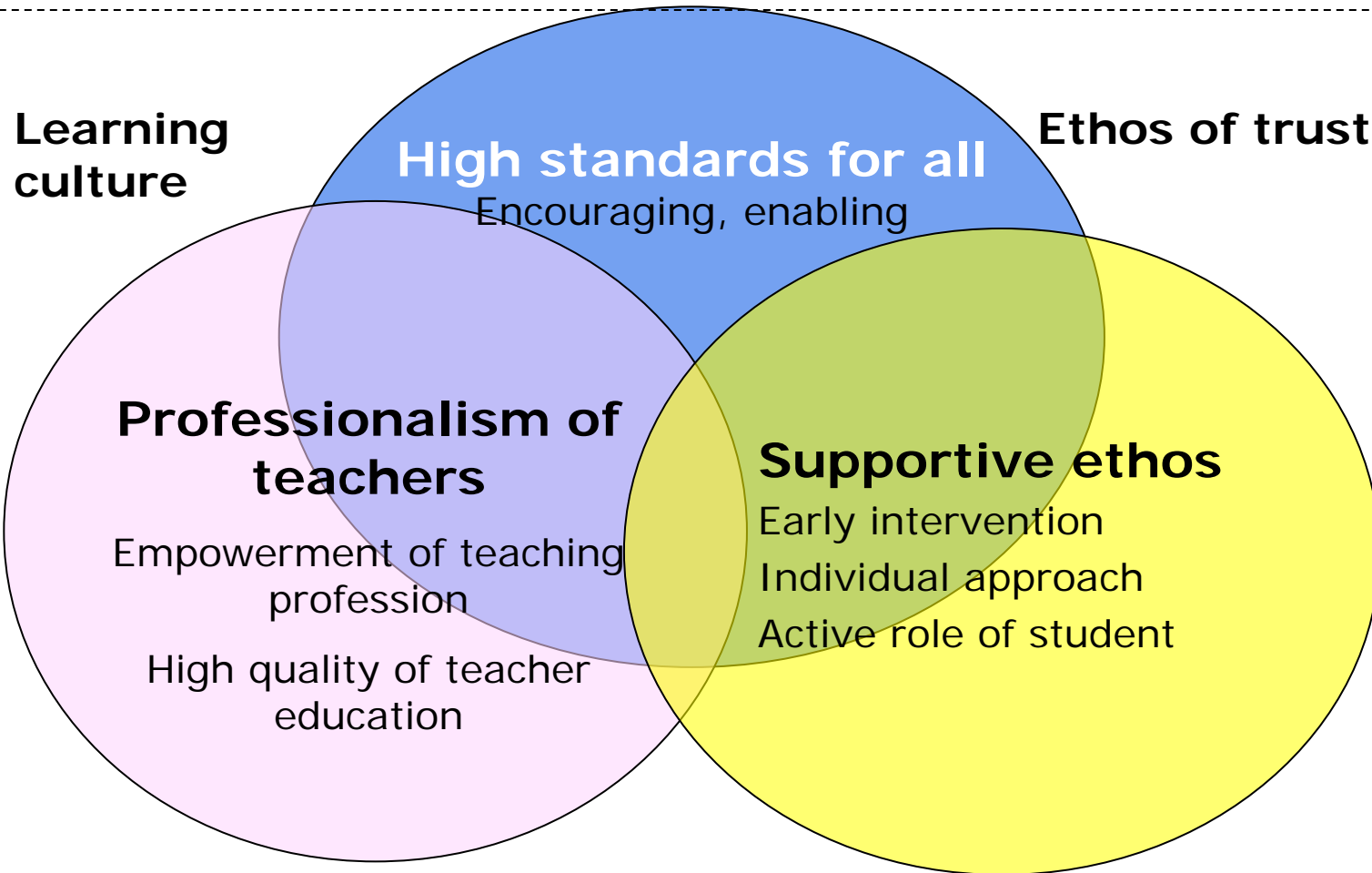
# Projected growth of the tertiary educational attainment of 25-64 population



Source: OECD Higher education to 2030, vol. 1: Demography



# The Finnish basic education as we want to see it



**Education system:**  
comprehensive, non-selective, central steering, local  
implementation and innovation





# Success factors

- High academic achievement
- Equality-based policies, services for all, broad educational and social mission
- Balance of central authority with local control
- Mutual trust as glue
- High value placed on education – teachers as valued experts
- High level of teacher preparation
- Individual support – multilayered approach to respond to signs that students are falling behind
- Demonstrated willingness and ability to change – reforms step by step

- Divided parallel education system with consequent achievement gap until 1970
  1. A long heated debate preceded the 1968 Act on Basic Education Reform
  2. National implementation of comprehensive school reform from North to South 1972-1976
- 1970 first national curriculum – strongly centralised
- Teacher education to universities in mid-1970s – research-based teacher education
- Higher standards for all – ability grouping discontinued in 1985 curricular reform – individualisation
- Decentralisation of steering powers esp. during 1990s
  1. Very large autonomy of local authorities (330 municipalities) from 1990s – local authority rights in the Constitution
  2. Abolition of inspection of schools and textbooks
  3. No earmarks on state financial grants to municipalities as education providers
  4. Autonomy to organise schools and education process
  5. Total reform of educational legislation 1999 – emphasis on goals, pupils rights and duties – lean on administration
  6. Evaluation emphasised: thematic reviews and learning outcomes from sample-based tests
- National Core Curriculum reformed 1985, 1994 and 2004
- Recent emphasis on developing quality of basic education
- Reform of early intervention strategies 2010
  1. More structured and better planned support for those falling behind
- Proposal for the Reform of Finnish Basic Education 2020



## Teachers as valued experts A virtuous circle surrounding teaching

- High quality and status of teachers
- Teacher profession popular, highly competed entrance
- Prestige without high salaries
- Teachers active in the development of education
- Teachers supported – capacity building
- High status and good working conditions create large pool of applicants leading to
  - selective and intensive teacher preparation programs
  - success in early years of teaching
  - relative stability of teacher work force
  - success with students



## Finnish teachers are supportive

- Teachers act respectfully towards their students
- Teachers want to support individually their students
- Teachers prefer goals like learning to learn, problem solving, thinking abilities, responsibility and cooperation

National evaluation of comprehensive school pedagogy and teachers preferences in instruction 2008 (National Council for Evaluation in Education in Finland).



# Learning environments – possibility to innovation, individualised attention, stability

## Relatively small class sizes

- individualised attention, better performance, conditions for individual monitoring and correction of students' performance

## Relatively small school sizes

- personnel come to know students and monitor progress and behavior

## Stability of teachers and students

- not big differences among schools
- families respect the student's need for stability



# Questions for Finnish education

**Do we notice and care about non-conforming students?**

**Do we enable teachers and students to flourish?**

- Individual aspirations
- Engaging students (book learning vs. experiential learning)
- Technology use
- Integration of the arts

**Do we highlight higher-order skills, skills needed for future lives?**

- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills – Citizen Skills
- Innovation and entrepreneurial spirit and skills
- Empathy and understanding of other cultures

**Early warning signals about growing differences between schools in learning outcomes ?**



# Agenda for change

Highlight 21st  
Century Skills –  
Citizen skills

Increase of  
the Arts  
and PE

More  
diversified  
language  
program

Increase of  
the minimum  
instruction  
time

Multidisciplinary  
subject-groups

More individual freedom  
to choose between  
subjects and  
multidisciplinary subject-  
groups

# Directions for change – marrying the past and the future

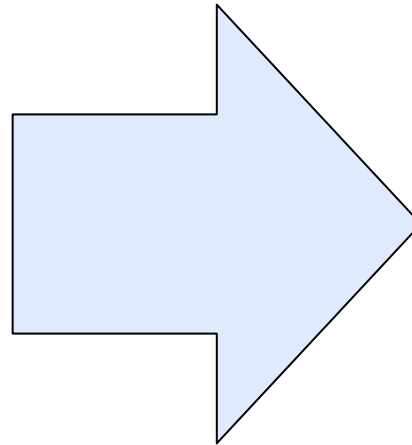
Equal access to  
education

Current social contract  
Public trust

Schools for acquisition  
of academic skills

Capacity building of  
teachers (individual)

From decentralisation  
to two-way partnership



Opportunity to  
develop individual talents  
and aspirations

Include voices of all  
stakeholders

Schools as agents  
of change

Collective capacity building  
of teachers, principals,  
administrators

Increase strategic capacity  
for change at all levels

Data and evidence to inform  
and steer the change





# Critical questions – Can we effectively lead a systemic change for better learning in future?

- Attractive mission and ambitious goals - high standards and expectations for all?
- Strategic capacity?
- Right policy instruments?
- Collective and individual capacity of teachers?
- Financial requirements and incentives?
- Data and evidence to inform us about developments and effects on teaching and learning?
- Possibilities for intervention if not adequate success?



# The four objectives for the reform of the Finnish basic education 2020

Clarify and enhance the mission and integrity

Ensure the high level knowledge and skills

Strengthen the individual support and guidance

Clarify the principles of providing basic education



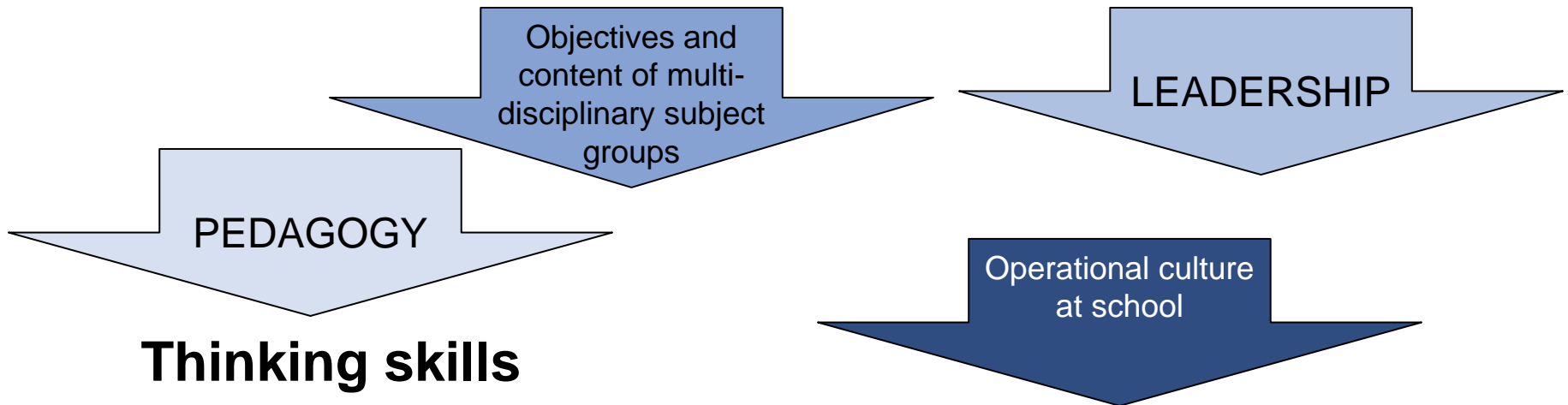
# Clarify and enhance the mission and integrity of Basic education

- Higher-order skills
- More focused subject content – Integration
- Broad Curriculum with
  1. subjects grouped into multidisciplinary subject groups
  2. defined goals for Citizen skills
- Citizen skills
  1. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills needed in the society and individual futures
  2. highlight deeper learning goals and high-order skills
  3. tools which support deeper learning and applied knowledge



# CITIZEN SKILLS

What innovations are needed in ...



**Thinking skills**

**Ways of working and interaction**

**Crafts and expressive skills**

**Participation and initiative**

**Self-awareness and personal responsibility**

## CITIZEN SKILLS

<b>Thinking skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Problem-solving, reasoning and argumentation</li><li>• Critical, analytical and systemic thinking</li><li>• Creative and innovative thinking</li></ul>
<b>Ways of working and interaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acquisition of information, analysis and use</li><li>• Skills to communicate, collaborate and negotiate</li><li>• Ability to work independently</li><li>• Time management and flexibility</li><li>• Entrepreneurship and ability to react to change</li><li>• ICT and other technology skills</li><li>• Learning skills</li></ul>
<b>Crafts and expressive skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coordination of body and hand</li><li>• Skills and courage of expression</li><li>• Planning and production skills</li><li>• Creativity and curiosity</li></ul>
<b>Participation and initiative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perception of community and society</li><li>• Initiative and leadership skills</li><li>• Ability to be constructive</li><li>• Acceptance of diversity and difference in perspectives</li><li>• Media skills</li><li>• Ability to think long-term and construct the future</li></ul>
<b>Self-awareness and personal responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-awareness and reflection</li><li>• Looking after health and security</li><li>• Ability to act in an ethical, responsible way and as a member of a community</li><li>• Good manners and empathy</li></ul>



# High standards and expectations for all – high level of knowledge and skills

- Higher skills and competences as the most important resource in society
- Demanding objectives and expectations – more focused content
- Integration – multidisciplinary subject groups and citizen skills
- Individual's more diversified development
- More versatile learning methods and environments
- Creativity and innovation



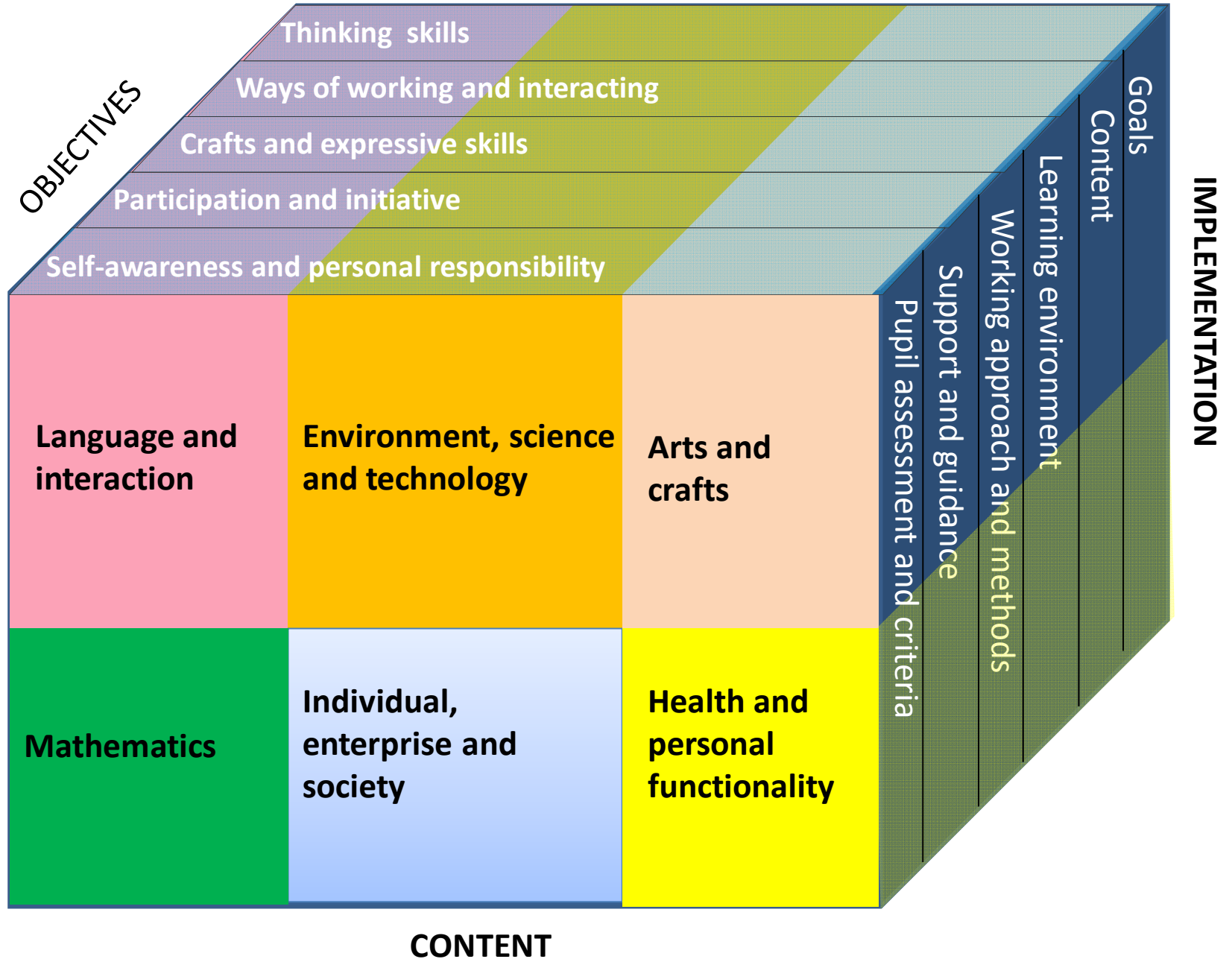
# Strengthen individual support and guidance

- Instruction based on the knowledge and skills of an individual pupil
- Pupils' individual growth and diversified development better regarded
- Enhanced motivation by increased opportunities to choose subjects and learning content
- Increased support – better planned and multi-layered support to respond to signs that pupils are falling behind
- Strengthened home-school cooperation



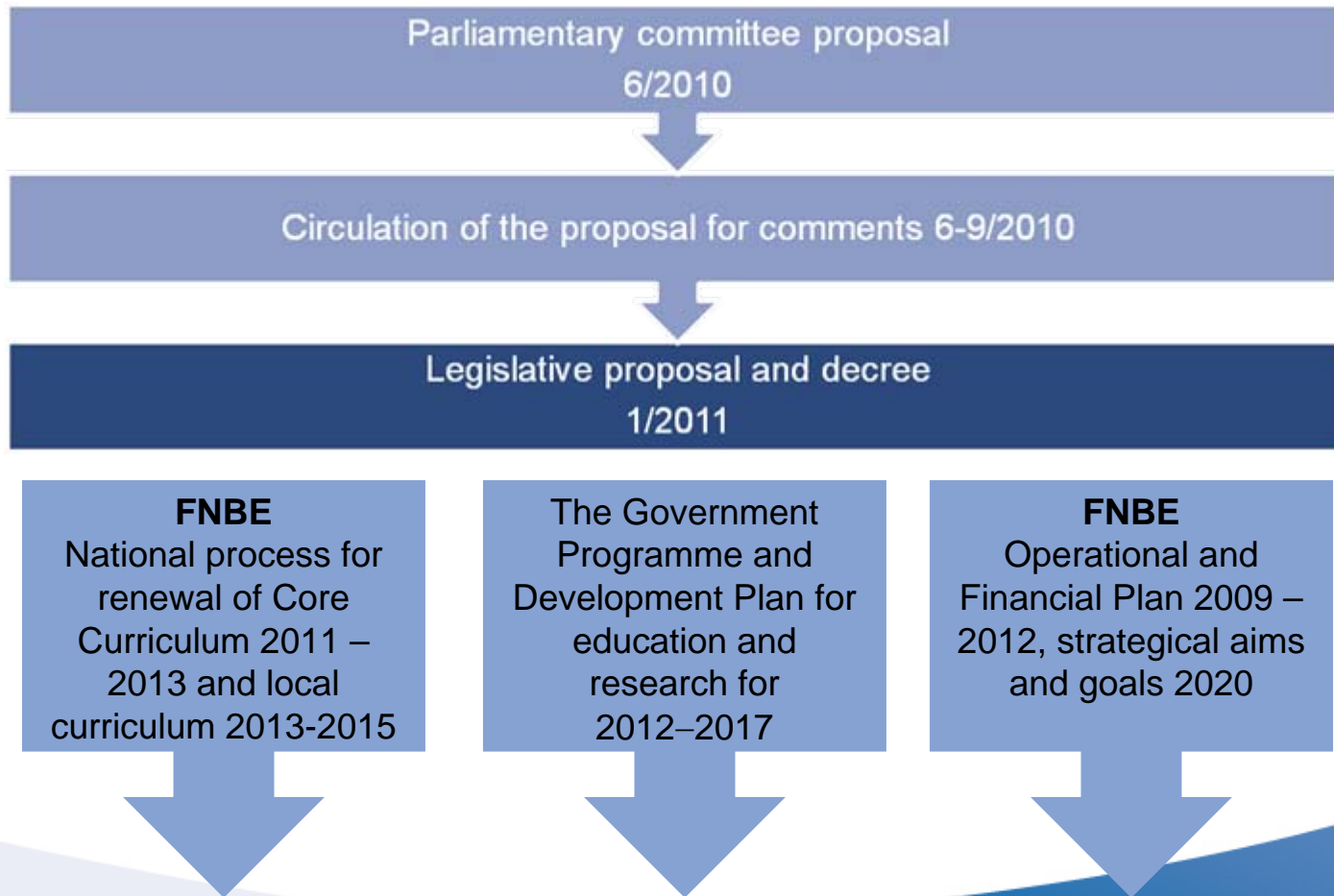
<b>Multi-disciplinary subject groups</b>	<b>Subjects</b>
<b>Language and interaction</b>	Mother tongue and literature Second national language Foreign languages
<b>Mathematics</b>	Mathematics
<b>Environment, science and technology</b>	Biology Geography Physics Chemistry
<b>Individual, enterprise and society</b>	Religion/Ethics Ethics History Social studies Educational and vocational guidance
<b>Arts and crafts</b>	Visual arts Music Crafts Drama
<b>Health and personal functionality</b>	Physical education Health education Home economics

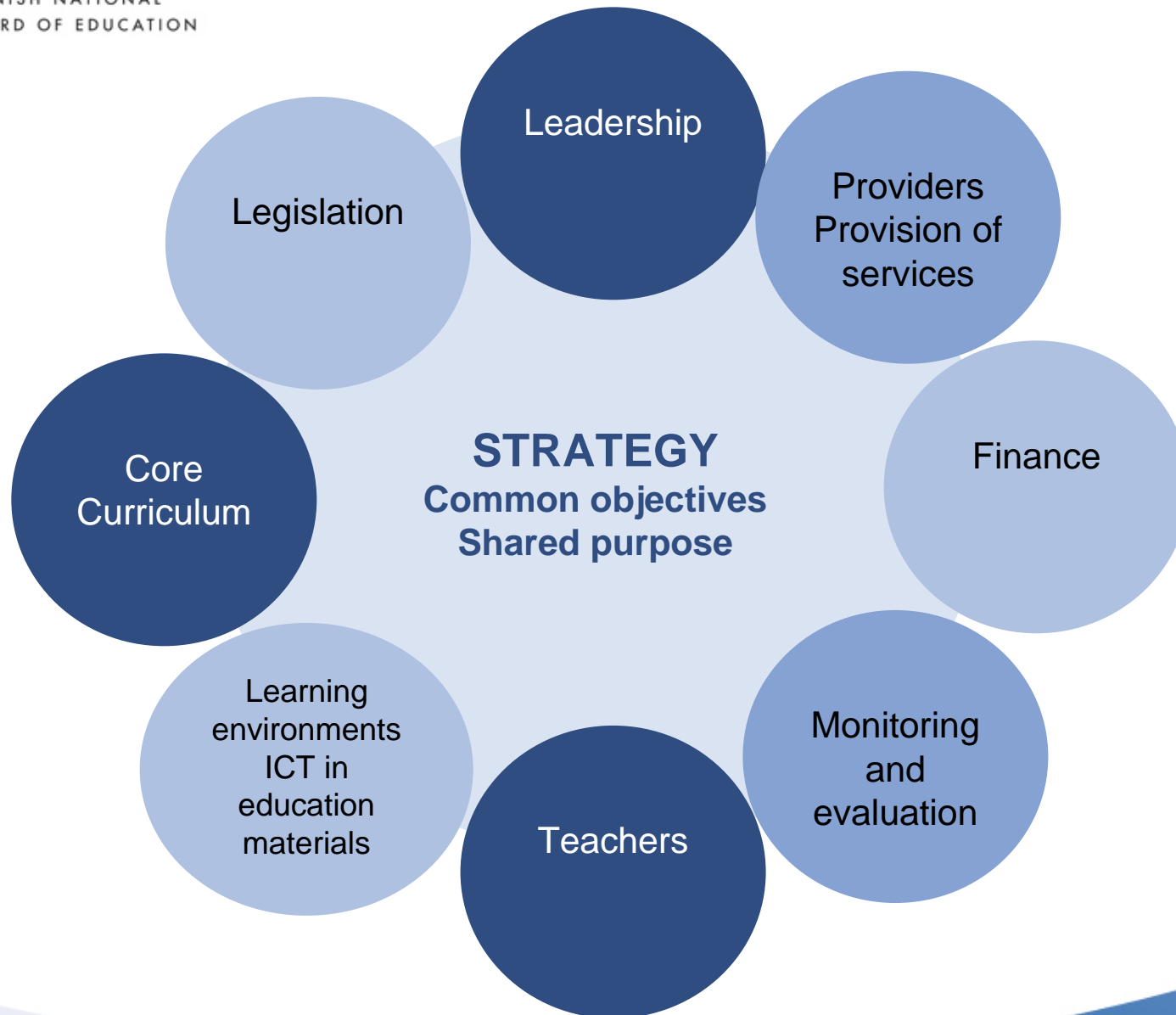






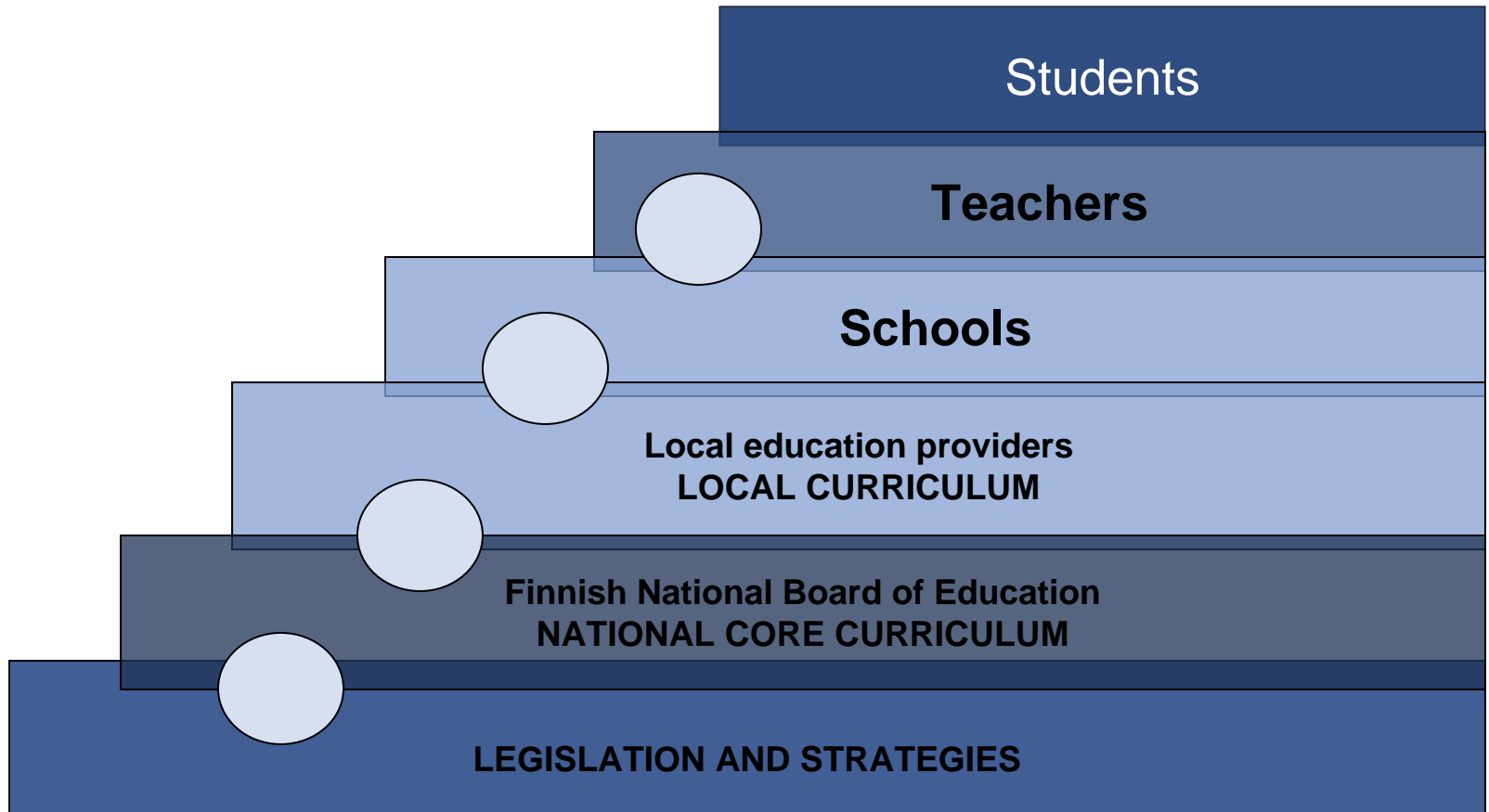
# Process of implementing proposal for the renewal of basic education







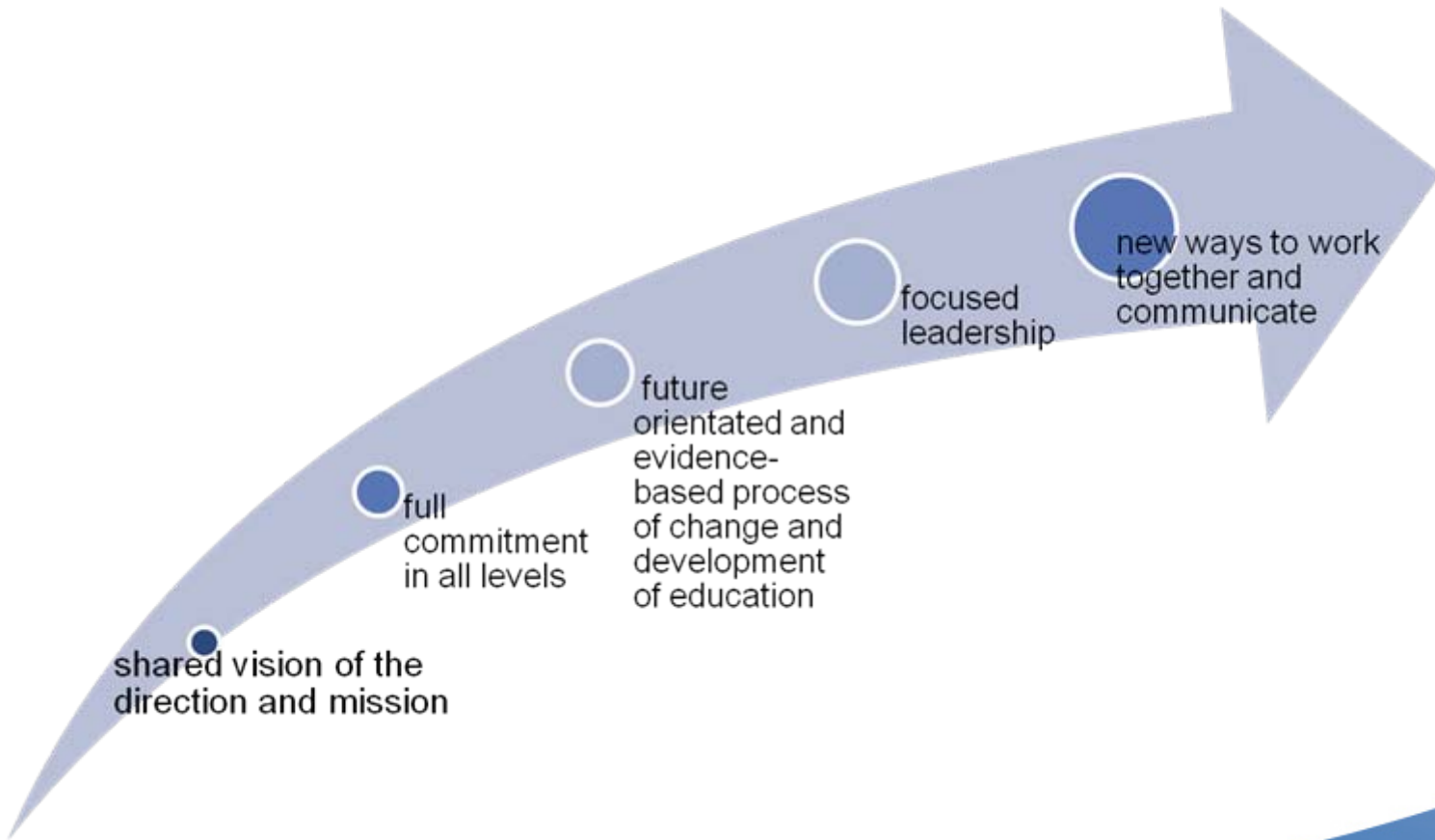
# Leadership matters – Teachers do it





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# To reach the goals set for the renewal, we need to have a ...

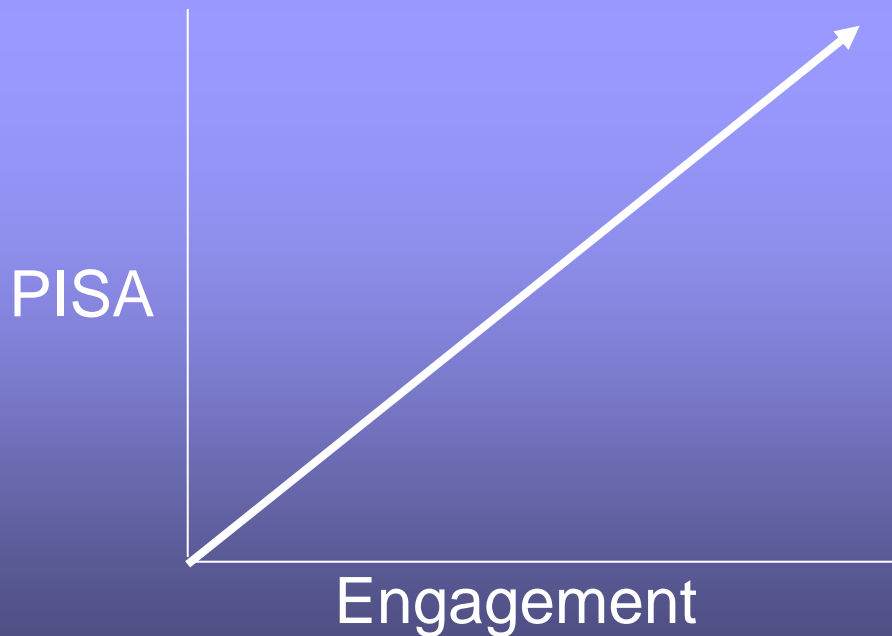


# The BIG idea

From good to great:

The Finnish school system will be great when every student and stakeholder says...

*“I love school AND I am doing well in school”*  
*“Schools put 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in the spotlight”*





Let's dive in!

