

# U.S. Is Urged to Raise Teachers' Status

By [SAM DILLON](#)

To improve its public schools, the United States should raise the status of the teaching profession by recruiting more qualified candidates, training them better and paying them more, according to a new [report](#) on comparative educational systems.

Andreas Schleicher, who oversees the international achievement test known by its acronym Pisa, says in his report that top-scoring countries like Korea, Singapore and Finland recruit only high-performing college graduates for teaching positions, support them with mentoring and other help in the classroom, and take steps to raise respect for the profession.

“Teaching in the U.S. is unfortunately no longer a high-status occupation,” Mr. Schleicher says in the report, prepared in advance of an educational conference that opens in New York on Wednesday. “Despite the characterization of some that teaching is an easy job, with short hours and summers off, the fact is that successful, dedicated teachers in the U.S. work long hours for little pay and, in many cases, insufficient support from their leadership.”

The conference, convened by the federal [Department of Education](#), was expected to bring together education ministers and leaders of teachers' unions from 16 countries as well as state superintendents from nine American states. Secretary of Education [Arne Duncan](#) said that he hoped educational leaders would use the conference to share strategies for raising student achievement.

“We're all facing similar challenges,” Mr. Duncan said in an interview.

The meeting occurs at a time when teachers' rights, roles and responsibilities are being widely debated in the United States.

Republicans in Wisconsin and several other states have been pushing legislation to limit teachers' collective bargaining rights and reduce taxpayer contributions to their pensions.

[President Obama](#) has been trying to promote a different view.

“In South Korea, teachers are known as ‘nation builders,’ and I think it's time we treated our teachers with the same level of respect,” Mr. Obama said in a speech on education on Monday.

Mr. Schleicher is a senior official at the [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development](#), or O.E.C.D., a Paris group that includes the world's major industrial powers. He wrote the new report, “What the U.S. Can Learn from the World's Most Successful Education Reform Efforts,” with Steven L. Paine, a CTB/McGraw-Hill vice president who is a former West Virginia schools superintendent, for the McGraw-Hill Research Foundation.

It draws on data from the Program for International Student Assessment, which periodically tests 15-year-old students in more than 50 countries in math, reading or science.

On the most recent Pisa, the top-scoring countries were Finland and Singapore in science, Korea and Finland in reading and Singapore and Korea in math. On average, American teenagers came in 15th in reading and 19th in science. American students placed 27th in math. Only 2 percent of American students scored at the highest proficiency level, compared with 8 percent in Korea and 5 percent in Finland.

The “five things U.S. education reformers could learn” from the high-performing countries, the report says, include adopting common academic standards — an effort well under way here, led by state governors — developing better tests for use by teachers in diagnosing students’ day-to-day learning needs and training more effective school leaders.

“Make a concerted effort to raise the status of the teaching profession” was the top recommendation.

University teaching programs in the high-scoring countries admit only the best students, and “teaching education programs in the U.S. must become more selective and more rigorous,” the report says.

Raising teachers’ status is not mainly about raising salaries, the report says, but pay is a factor.

According to O.E.C.D. data, the average salary of a veteran elementary teacher here was \$44,172 in 2008, higher than the average of \$39,426 across all O.E.C.D. countries (the figures were converted to compare the purchasing power of each currency).

But that salary level was 40 percent below the average salary of other American college graduates. In Finland, by comparison, the veteran teacher’s salary was 13 percent less than that of the average college graduate’s.

In an interview, Mr. Schleicher said the point was not that the United States spends too little on public education — only Luxembourg among the O.E.C.D. countries spends more per elementary student — but rather that American schools spend disproportionately on other areas, like bus transportation and sports facilities.

“You can spend a lot of money on education, but if you don’t spend it wisely, on improving the quality of instruction, you won’t get higher student outcomes,” Mr. Schleicher said.