



FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

Perceptions and efforts of students' and teachers' well- being in Finnish education

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International Symposium 14.3.2026 Tokio, Japan
School reform to enhance well-being of children and teachers

The preparation of these slides was undertaken in collaboration with Professor Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen at University of Jyväskylä, Finland



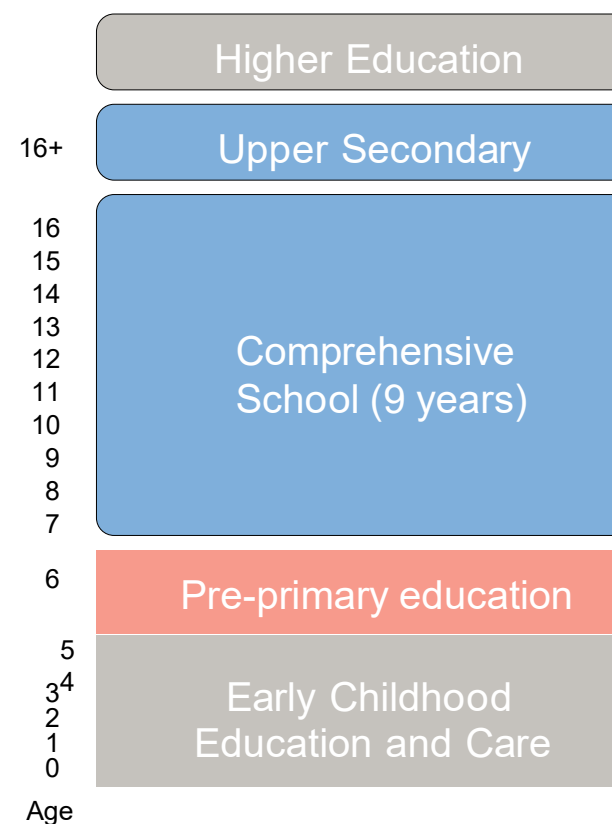
Finland is the happiest country in the world for the eighth year in a row



Finnish success in education



- Finnish education has constantly been among the top countries in the OECD surveys: PISA, PIRLS (for 10- year-olds) and PIAAC (for 16-65-year-olds).
- Almost all schools are **public**
- **Education is free of charge for families**
- No school inspections or national tests
- Very low power distance between schools
- Early recognition and interventions for children at-risk
- Finland's **well-prepared teachers** (Masters degree from the university) are world-famous for being trusted as professionals who enjoy significant pedagogical autonomy in their classrooms.



**The background to the
discussion of educational
policies regarding the well-
being of children and teachers**



Government Programme: Well-being Objectives in Education and Society

- **Support for learning:** Legislation to ensure sufficient and individualized support while reducing the administrative burden on teaching staff.
- **Strengthening authority:** Teachers' and principals' powers to intervene in disruptive behavior during school hours will be reinforced, including legislative changes to more effectively restrict mobile device use during the school day to support student focus.
- **Safe learning environment:** Every child's right to a safe learning environment and school peace will be ensured.
- **Supporting well-being:** Well-being will be promoted through broad cooperation among various societal actors. A framework will be defined for collaboration between wellbeing services counties, municipalities, schools, the third sector, and parishes.
- **Cross-sectoral physical activity program:** A program will be developed to promote an active lifestyle and functional capacity through cooperation across administrative sectors.



Basic Education Act (628/1998)

The Best Interests of the Child and Support for Growth

- The aim of education is to support pupils' growth into humanity and ethically responsible membership of society.
- Education is organized according to the pupils' age and capabilities, promoting healthy growth and development.
- The best interests of the child must be the primary consideration when planning and organizing education.
- Each working day, pupils must be provided with a well-organized and supervised, **nutritious free meal**.
- A pupil can participate in **morning and/or afternoon activities** either before or after the school day.



Basic Education Act (628/1998)

Support for Learning and School Attendance

- The pupil has the right to receive support as soon as the need arises.
- Provisions concerning the organization of support, assessment, planning, and special arrangements due to limitations in learning ability.

Safety and Learning Environment

- The right to a safe learning environment.
- Pupil welfare services includes psychological and school social worker services, and cooperation with health care.
- Disciplinary and safety measures, such as removing a disruptive pupil and inspecting belongings.

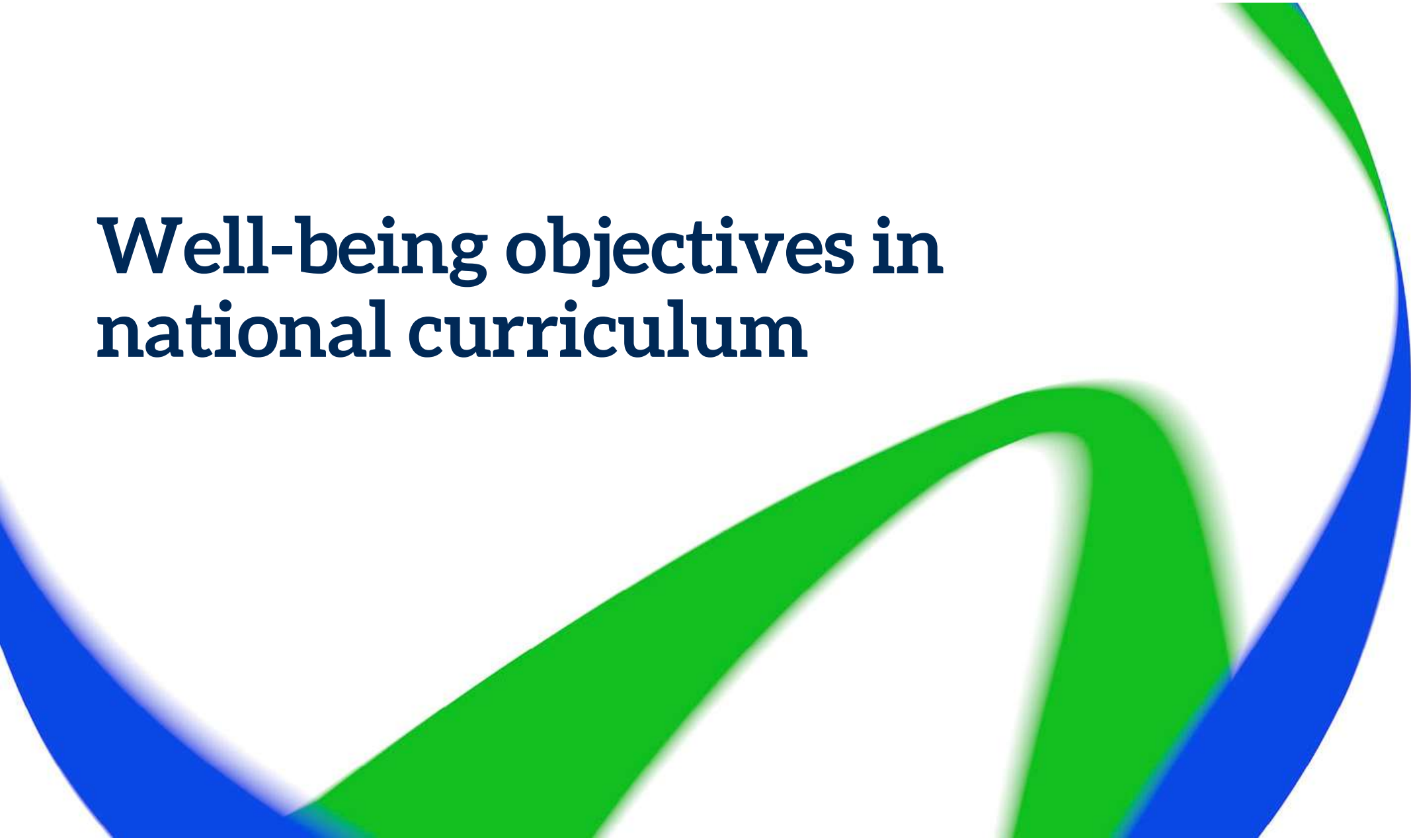


Evaluation Responsibility in Basic Education Based on the Finnish Basic Education Act (628/1998)

- Education providers must evaluate the education they offer and participate in external evaluations of their activities.
- The purpose of **education evaluation** is to:
 - Ensure the goals of the Basic Education Act are met
 - Support the development of education
 - Improve conditions for learning
- **The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC / Karvi)** coordinates national evaluations and supports quality development.
- **Transparency of Results:** Key findings from evaluations must be made public (but school level results are not public).



Well-being objectives in national curriculum



Wellbeing in the Curriculum

- **Wellbeing and learning are inseparably linked.** Schoolwork should promote both simultaneously.
- **The school's operational culture must support pupils' holistic wellbeing** (physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing).
- **Wellbeing is promoted through a safe and encouraging learning environment.** Pupils should feel a sense of belonging and be treated with respect.
- **Student welfare is part of everyday school life.** It supports pupils' wellbeing in cooperation with homes and other stakeholders.
- **Wellbeing is also addressed in the content and methods of teaching.** For example, through emotional and social skills, physical education, and health education.
- **Community and participation are prerequisites for wellbeing.** Pupils take part in planning and developing school activities.



Wellbeing in Transversal Competence

Wellbeing is a key dimension of **transversal competence** and is reflected in several areas:

- **Taking care of oneself and everyday skills:** Pupils are guided to recognize and strengthen their own wellbeing, healthy lifestyles, and safety.
- **Interaction and cooperation:** Social wellbeing is supported through learning to work constructively in groups and resolve conflicts.
- **Thinking and learning to learn:** Psychological wellbeing enhances learning motivation and self-confidence.
- **Participation and influence:** Inclusion in the school community fosters a sense of meaning and belonging.



What actions have been taken?



Government Actions to Develop Basic Education During the Parliamentary Term

- **Reform of learning support** (from August 2025).
- Additional lesson hours for **basic skills** (from August 2025).
- Improving **working peace** by restricting disruptive use of mobile devices during lessons (from August 2025).
- Additional preparatory education (for pupils whose Finnish language skills are not sufficient for studying in a regular basic education group) and reform of **Finnish as a second language (S2)**.
- From August 2026, promoting an **active lifestyle** becomes mandatory under the Basic Education Act.



Summary of Well-being Work at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)

- **Loneliness and Social Exclusion:**
 - Materials are being compiled to support education staff in identifying and addressing loneliness and ostracism.
 - Collaboration with parent organizations aims to strengthen home-school cooperation and community building.
- **Anti-bullying and Violence Prevention:**
 - €4.8 million in grants allocated to ensure safe learning environments.
 - Training for school leaders includes themes of loneliness and exclusion.
 - Updates to the national anti-bullying website are underway.
- **Digital Well-being:**
 - Recommendations for children's screen time are being developed with Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, including input from children and parents.



Summary of Well-being Work at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)

- **Hobbies and Leisure:**
 - The Finnish Model for Leisure Activities operates in 263 municipalities, offering 10 000 hobby groups weekly.
- **Physical Activity Promotion:**
 - The goal of the Schools on the Move programme is to create a more physically active school day for all.
- **Literacy Programme 2025:**
 - Focus on “developing readers,” addressing reading challenges, multilingualism, and equality. New grants support youth involvement and library-based literacy work.
- **Participation and Inclusion:**
 - A new ESR+ project with Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare focuses on developing models for parental support and digital well-being.



**How pupil wellbeing is
measured in Finland?**



School Health Promotion Survey (THL - Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare)

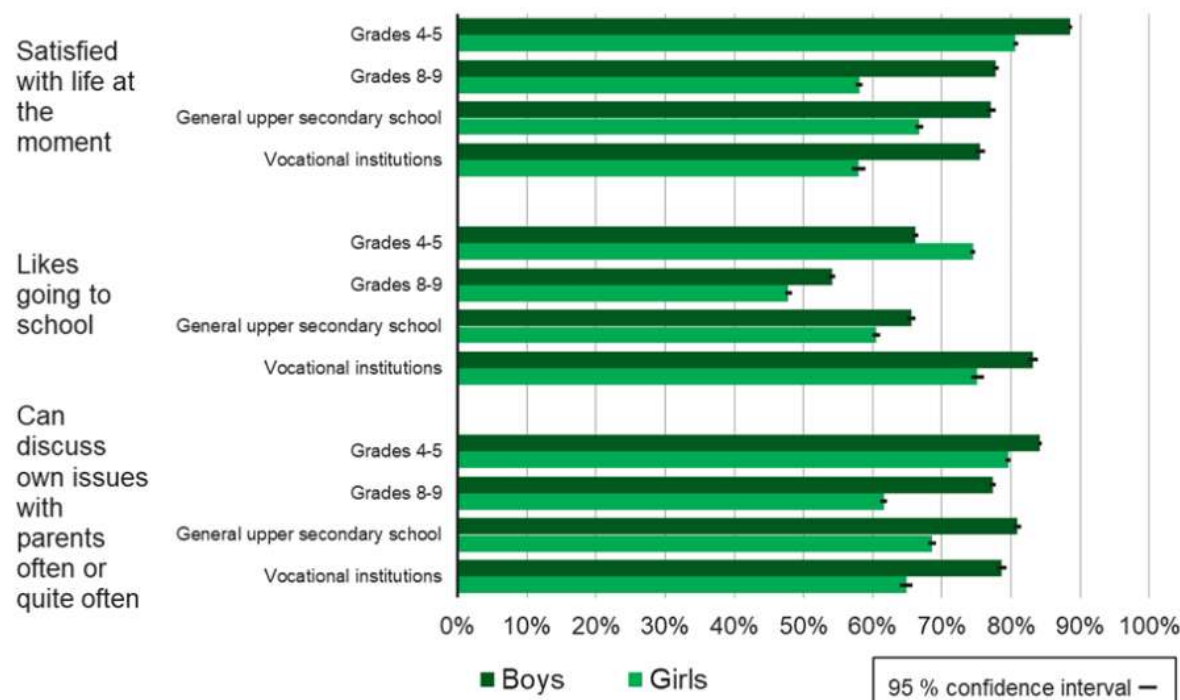


- The most comprehensive tool for **monitoring pupil wellbeing**.
- Conducted **every two years** for pupils in grades 4–5 and 8–9, and for upper secondary students. The survey is **mandatory** for all students.
- **Measures:**
 - Self-perceived health and mental wellbeing
 - Engagement and interest in school
 - Experiences of loneliness, bullying, and safety
 - Lifestyle habits (e.g., physical activity, substance use, and nutrition)
- **Results** are used by schools, municipalities, and wellbeing services counties for development work.

Well-being of children and young people - Results of the School Health Promotion Study 2025 (n = 269 899)



- Students find their health to be good.
- They were satisfied with their lives.
- Boys were more commonly satisfied with their lives than girls.
- Students like studying.
- They felt that they could discuss their personal matters with their parents. Boys felt this way more often than girls.



Indicators describing the well-being experienced by children and young people by gender and school level in 2025, %.

Student Welfare Plans and Evaluation in Curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education)

- Each education provider must have a **student welfare plan** that outlines actions to promote wellbeing.
- Wellbeing is assessed as part of **everyday school life** and communal student welfare.
- Focus is on **preventive work** and strengthening **community wellbeing**.

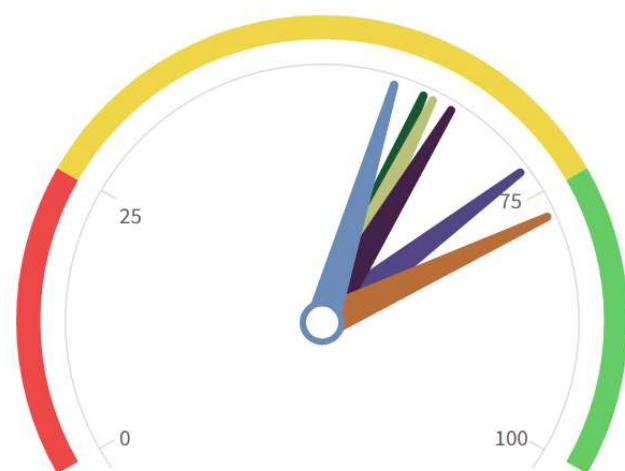


TEAviisari (TEApointer) (THL & Finnish National Agency for Education)



- A benchmarking tool for health promotion in schools and educational institutions.
- Evaluates wellbeing, health, and safety-related practices.
- Results support strategic planning and comparison between institutions.

Basic education : Whole country 2023



Basic education

- Commitment
- Management
- Monitoring and needs assessment
- Resources
- Common practices
- Participation
- Other core functions

Data updated 24.10.2025

Environment and Community Assessment

- Every school undergoes an assessment **every three years** to assess:
 - Physical learning environment
 - Psychosocial wellbeing
 - Safety and health conditions
- The results lead to agreed actions and follow-up.



Programmes to improve wellbeing in schools



Schools on the Move



[About us | Schools on the Move](#)
<https://youtu.be/3lLmhUIAApY>



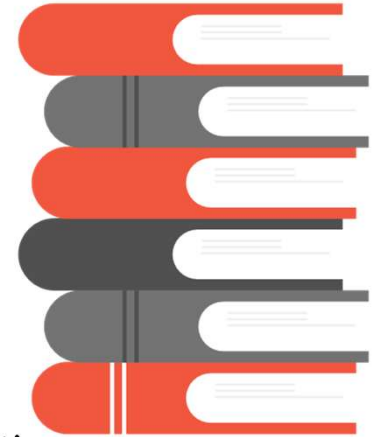
- **Goal:** To create a more physically active and enjoyable school day for all students.
- **Approach:** The programme is not a one-size-fits-all intervention but a flexible framework that schools adapt to their own needs.
- Three Core Areas:
 - **Creating an Active Culture** – Encouraging movement throughout the school day
 - **Developing Pedagogy** – Integrating physical activity into teaching and learning methods.
 - **Increasing Movement** – Offering more opportunities for physical activity during and outside lessons.
- **Reach:** Over 90% of Finnish comprehensive schools have participated.
- **Coordination:** Led by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education, coordinated by LIKES Research Centre.

Finnish Literacy Programme

- The programme implements the **National Literacy Strategy 2030**, aiming to make Finland the most multiliterate country in the world.
- **Main Goals**
 - Promote literacy at all ages, from early childhood to adulthood.
 - Support reading and literacy through targeted sub-programmes for early education, schools, and municipalities.
 - Strengthen collaboration between literacy actors across sectors.
 - Provide free tools, materials, training, and events to support literacy work.
 - Distribute state grants to fund local and national literacy initiatives.

- **Key Components**

- Sub-programmes:
 - Reading Early Childhood Education
 - Reading School
 - Reading Municipality
- **Literacy Network:** Launched in 2024 to bring together professionals from education, libraries, media, and more.
- **Ecosystem Approach:** Builds a shared understanding and structure for literacy development across society.



#WEREAD

The Finnish teachers' occupational wellbeing



Teachers' work-related stress

- Teaching is recognized as highly stressful profession, and teachers typically report high levels of occupational stress
- Defined as **unpleasant and negative emotions** (e.g., tension, restlessness, anxiety, frustration, or nervousness) **resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher.**
- 78% of teachers in the US feel often physically and emotionally exhausted (American Federation of Teachers, 2015)
- **43% of Finnish teachers** experienced very or quite often work-related **stress** (Länsikallio et al., 2018)
- **67% of Finnish teachers** were very or quite often **excited about their work** (Länsikallio et al., 2018)



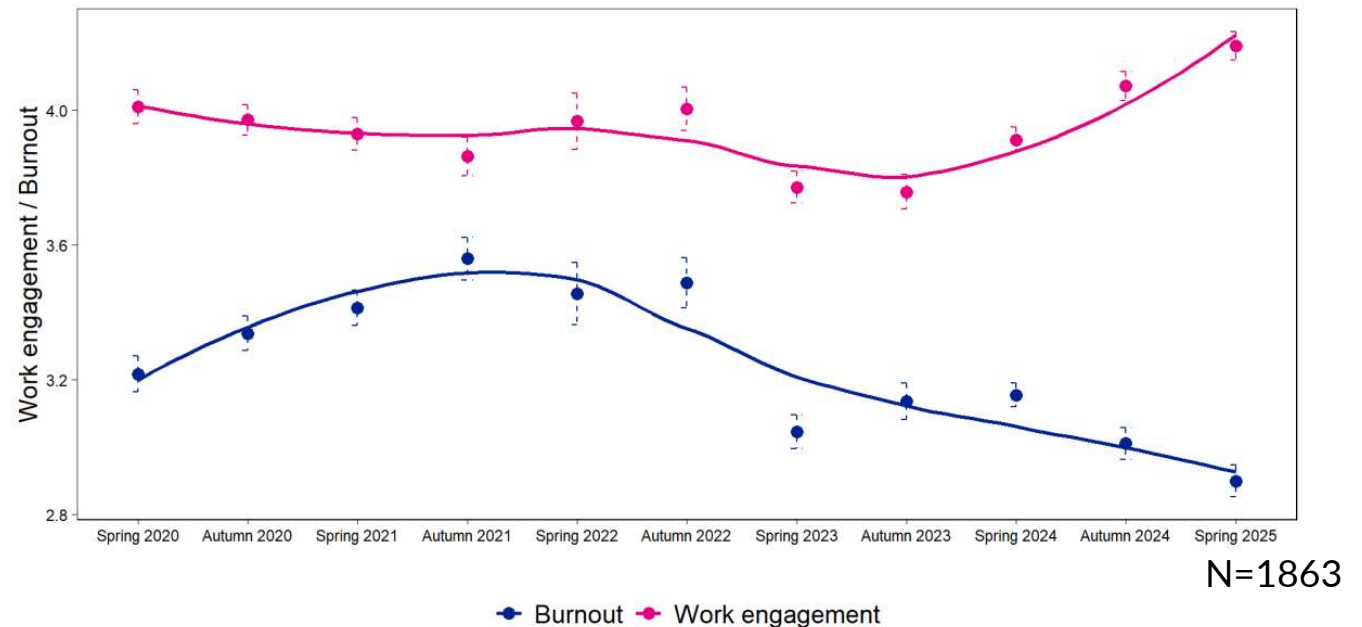
The Teachers' Occupational Wellbeing Study*: Time Series (trends during years 2020-2025)



The Job Demands–Resources model:

Work engagement refers to a positive work-related experience characterized by energy, dedication, and absorption in one's work.

Burnout is a negative experience typically marked by exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of inadequacy.



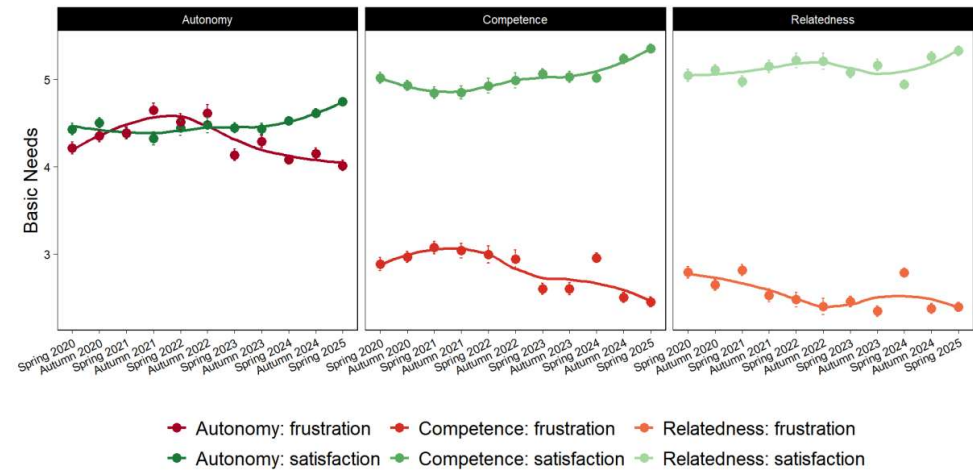
(a) Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree – 6 = Strongly agree. Higher values indicate higher perceived work engagement / burnout

*Heinimäki, O.-P., Niikkonen, I., Huttunen, I., Vinni-Laakso, J., & Hietajärvi, L. (2025). *The Teachers' Occupational Wellbeing Study [Data set]*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17142283>

The Teachers' Occupational Wellbeing Study*: Satisfaction and Frustration of **Basic Psychological Needs**



- Core psychological needs that are essential for well-being and optimal functioning:
 - **Autonomy**: the experience of being able to act according to one's own values and choices, as well as having influence over one's work.
 - **Competence**: the feeling of being effective and capable in relation to one's tasks.
 - **Relatedness**: a sense of connection with others and the feeling of being accepted and valued.
- **Satisfaction** has shown an increasing trend.
- **Frustration** concerning competence and relatedness has decreased over time.



(a) Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree – 7 = Strongly agree. Higher values indicate a stronger experience of need satisfaction or frustration at work.

*Heinimäki, O.-P., Niikkonen, I., Huttunen, I., Vinni-Laakso, J., & Hietajärvi, L. (2025). *The Teachers' Occupational Wellbeing Study [Data set]*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17142283>

The Teachers' Occupational Wellbeing Study*: Recovery, Meaning of Work, and Illegitimate Tasks

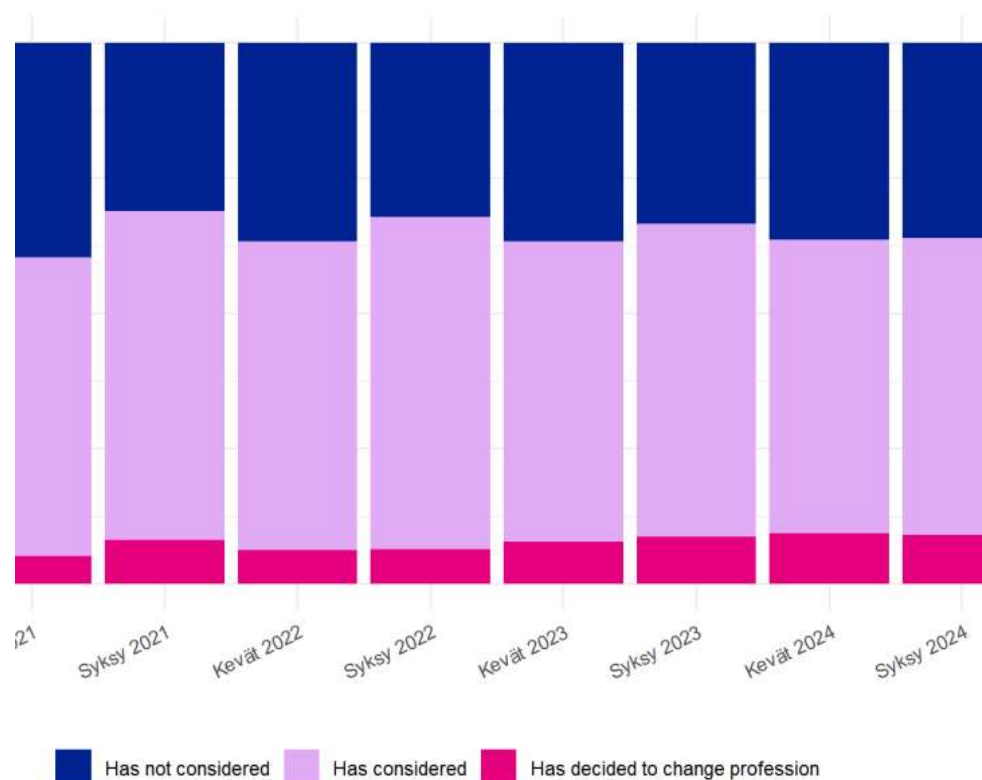


- **Recovery** during free time: teachers' reported recovery has **improved** during the observation period.
- **Meaning of work** refers to how important and purposeful teachers consider their work to be:
 - The results show some fluctuations across measurement points, but since Autumn 2024, meaningfulness has shown a **clear upward trend**.
- **Illegitimate tasks** refer to tasks that teachers perceive as either unnecessary or irrelevant to their core work, or tasks that are considered unreasonable or inappropriate given their professional role, expertise, or job description. Such tasks consume resources that could otherwise be directed toward core responsibilities like teaching.
 - According to the results, the experience of illegitimate tasks has **decreased**.
- **Work-related stress** is often more prevalent in the teaching profession than in many other fields.
 - **Workload** is one of the most significant sources of this stress. When excessive workload becomes prolonged, it can lead to burnout and diminish work engagement, work quality, and job satisfaction.
 - According to the results, stress related to workload after 2022 a **downward trend** has become apparent.

The Teachers' Occupational Wellbeing Study*: Turnover intentions



- **Turnover intentions** offer a perspective on teachers' wellbeing and the attractiveness of the profession.
- Teachers' turnover intentions have remained relatively stable throughout the study period.
- While many teachers report having considered leaving the profession, far fewer seem to have planned to do so.



Teachers' wellbeing and teacher-student interaction

- **Teacher wellbeing is associated with teacher-student interactions**
 - Higher work-related stress is associated with
 - a lower quality of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (Chan et al., 2023, 2025).
 - Higher work engagement is associated with
 - the higher quality of teacher-student interactions (Soininen et al., 2023).
- High quality classroom interactions is associated with higher levels of job satisfaction of teachers (Virtanen et al., 2019)
- **The quality of teacher-student interaction is related to students' situational engagement in learning (Pöysä et al., 2019).**

-Chan, S. W., Pöysä, S., Lerkkanen, M.-K., & Pakarinen, E. (2023). Teachers' Occupational Well-Being in Relation to Teacher-Student Interactions at the Lower Secondary School Level. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*.

-Chan, S. W., Pöysä, S., Lerkkanen, M.-K., & Pakarinen, E. (2025). Teachers' occupational well-being in relation to teacher-student interactions in primary school. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 14(1), 1-27.

-Pöysä, S., Vasalampi, K., Muotka, J., Lerkkanen, M.-K., Poikkeus, A.-M., & Nurmi, J.-E. (2019). Teacher-Student Interaction and Lower Secondary School Students' Situational Engagement. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 374-392.

-Soininen, V., Pakarinen, E., & Lerkkanen, M.-K. (2023). Reciprocal associations among teacher-child interactions, teachers' work engagement, and children's social competence. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 85, 101508.

-Virtanen, T., Vasalampi, K., Torppa, M., Lerkkanen, M.-K., Nurmi, J.-E. (2019). Changes in students' psychological well-being during transition from primary school to lower secondary school: A person-centered approach. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 69, 138-149.



Recommendations from Teacher Union



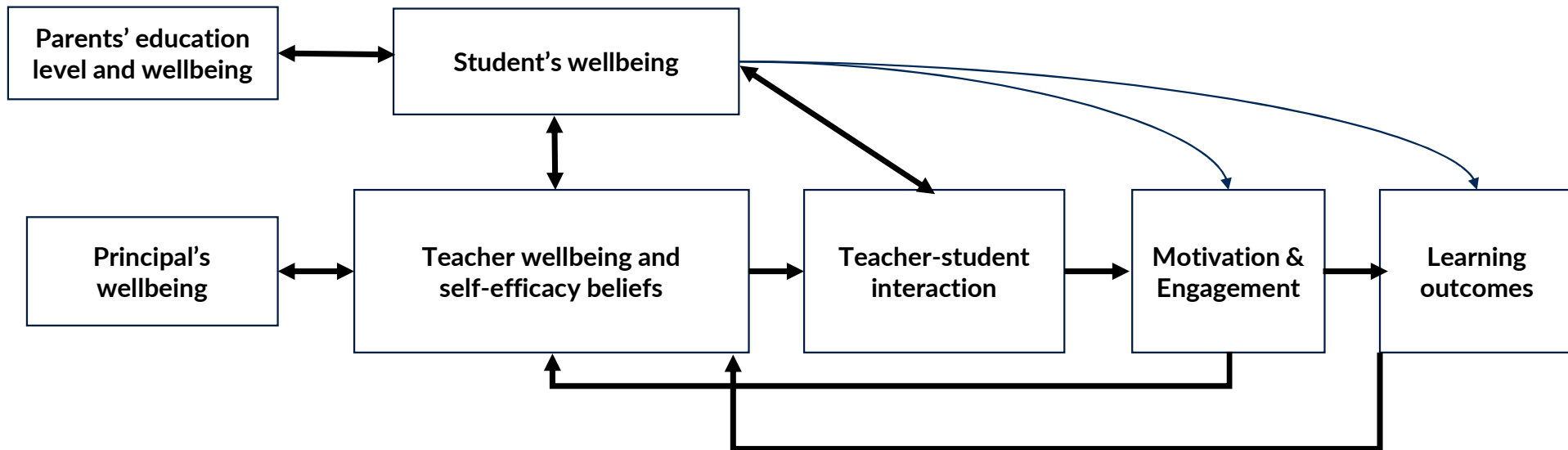
Teacher Union proposes the following measures to ensure high-quality teaching and teachers' well-being:

1. Reduce the average group size.
2. Allocate resources for splitting groups during divided lessons.
3. Add resource teachers to schools to support groups as additional resources.
4. Establish regulations on special education teacher ratios and maximum group sizes, considering the number of students needing support in the group.
5. Allow students in preparatory education to be integrated into other subjects' lessons.
6. Ensure teachers have sufficient time for collaboration with colleagues and parents.



Conclusion

Interaction between wellbeing and learning outcomes



Result summary from following projects:

- First Steps study (Lerkkänen et al. 2006-2017) www.jyu.fi/alkuportaa
- Teacher and Student Stress and Interaction (TESSI) -study (Lerkkänen & Pakarinen, 2016-2022) www.jyu.fi/tessi
- Teacher interaction and assessment competences (OPA) –teacher training project (Lerkkänen 2019-2021) www.jyu.fi/opa
- EDUCA – Education for the Future Flagship (Lerkkänen et al., 2024-2028) www.educaflagship.fi



Thank you!
Arigatō gozaimasu!

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