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**Singapore: Teacher and Principal Quality**

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Teaching is a highly-respected profession in Singapore, not simply because it is part of the Confucian culture to value teachers, but because everyone knows how hard it is to become a teacher and everyone also knows that Singapore’s teachers have year in and year out produced students who are among the world’s highest achievers. While teachers’ base salaries are not particularly high compared to many other top-performing countries, they are high enough to make compensation an unimportant consideration for students weighing teaching against other professions as they make their career choices. Singapore also has a system of generous bonuses that boost teachers’ salaries by tens of thousands over the course of their careers. The bonuses are based on Singapore’s rather sophisticated teacher appraisal system in which teachers are evaluated annually in 16 areas, including in the contributions they make to the school and community.

The quality of Singapore school leaders is a function of the high standards that applicants must meet to become a teacher, because teachers constitute the sole pool from which school leaders are selected, as well as the very high quality of the training and support that individuals selected for promotion up the leadership career ladder receive from the National Institute of Education.

**Teacher Recruitment and Compensation**

Singapore recruits its teachers from the top third of high school graduates. Each year, Singapore calculates the number of teachers it will need, and opens only that many spots in the training programs. On average, only one out of eight applicants for admission to their teacher education programs is accepted, and that only after a grueling application process.  Those who are accepted have typically not only taken Singapore’s A-level exams (the most challenging of all the exams available to Singapore students) but will have scored at least in the middle of the score range, a very high level of accomplishment. The many other steps in the application process include tough panel interviews that focus on the personal qualities that make for a good teacher, as well as intensive reviews of their academic record and their contributions to their school and community.

Teachers’ salaries in Singapore are largely commensurate with other professions. The maximum salary for a lower secondary teacher is twice the GDP per capita, indicating that teacher compensation is generally quite strong. The Ministry of Education monitors teacher salaries in relation to other professional salaries, and adjusts them accordingly to ensure that they are competitive. Successful teachers have the opportunity to earn retention bonuses, which can range from $10,000 – $36,000 every three to five years, and performance bonuses, which can be up to 30% of their base salary. Eligibility for these bonuses is determined through rigorous annual evaluations that also serve as a basis for coaching and mentoring between teachers. Including bonuses, the modal annual salary for teachers aged 25-29 was $43,563 in 2009, and the maximum salary was $77,693. This compares favorably to the OECD averages of $41,701 for a mid-career upper secondary teacher and a $51,317 maximum salary.

Teachers’ compensation depends in part on where they are on the various career ladders (see below) available to them. Promotion up these career ladders depends entirely on demonstrated performance and demonstrated potential.

**Teacher Initial Education and Training**

There is only one teacher training institution in Singapore – the National Institute of Education (NIE). The NIE is located in the Nanyang Technological University, one of the most prestigious institutions in the hierarchy of Singapore’s institutions of higher education. All teachers are trained at the National Institute of Education (NIE), which offers both bachelors and post-graduate degrees. Eighty percent of accepted applicants have already completed a bachelor’s degree in the subject they are going to teach before entering a teacher education program. During their training, teacher candidates receive a monthly stipend equivalent to 60% of a starting teacher salary, and their tuition is covered by the Ministry of Education. Once they have completed training, teachers must commit to three full years on the job.

Prospective teachers who already hold a bachelor’s degree in an approved subject area must complete one of the teacher education programs at NIE, as well as pass or waive out of an Entrance Proficiency Test. There are different programs for different teaching candidates, depending on the candidate’s level of education when entering the program. These include the Diploma in Education, the Postgraduate Diploma in Education and the Bachelor of Arts/Science (Education), and range from two to four years. Teachers with other credentials, such as A-levels (upper secondary leaving exams) or polytechnical degrees, must complete an NIE degree program. The programs at NIE are focused on pedagogy and connections between educational subjects, rather than on advanced academic training within a specific subject. Which is to say that one cannot become a teacher in Singapore without mastery of the subject one is going to teach at a high level, as well as at least a year of challenging instruction in the craft of teaching. This curriculum is constantly updated to reflect the changing needs of Singapore’s education system.

**Teacher Career Ladders**

There are three directions a teaching career can take in Singapore: the teaching track, the leadership track and the specialist track. In the teaching track, teachers work their way up to becoming Principal Master Teachers. In the leadership track, teachers can be promoted from a leadership position within the school all the way up to the position of Director-General of Education. In the specialist track, teachers are focused on research and teaching policy, with the highest-level position being Chief Specialist. There are 13 levels within each track. The first three levels are considered “general”; the next two stages are “senior” and then the top eight stages are “super senior”. At each level, there are salary increases and additional training and mentorship opportunities. For the first three years of teaching, all teachers receive annual raises. After that, raises are only available as part of promotion along the career track. (Annual performance bonuses are available for between 10-30 percent of teachers’ salary.)

Teachers do not automatically get promoted to the next level. Teachers’ performance on the Educational Performance Management System (EPMS) determines when they are eligible for advancement up the career ladder. The EPMS includes an annual evaluation in three areas: Professional Practice, Leadership Management and Personal Effectiveness. Teachers are expected to set and meet personal goals for their work, and demonstrate improvements in a rubric of competencies during observations of their teaching.

The EPMS is also used to determine teachers’ fit for the career pathways. All teachers are observed for three years in order to determine which career path would best suit them. However, after teachers are assigned a career path, they may make a lateral move if they feel the pathway does not suit them. Talent and potential for leadership is identified early, and these teachers are then groomed for future leadership roles. Singaporean schools operate under the belief that poor leadership is a major reason for school failure, and by choosing talented individuals early in their careers and investing in them heavily, schools can avoid this problem. This training often involves promotion to department head at a young age, recruitment to several academic and administrative committees, stints at the Ministry of Education and a six-month executive leadership course at NIE.

**Teacher Professional Development**

Teachers have access to several types of professional development opportunities. They can improve their practice through courses at the National Institute of Education (NIE) or at the Academy of Singapore Teachers, which was established by the Ministry of Education and is an organization dedicated to providing conferences, forums and seminars for teachers, or study leave for those wanting to pursue degree programs. These programs range from in-service training to online classes on a variety of subjects related to teaching. The Ministry and NIE also offer scholarship opportunities for teachers seeking MA and PhD degrees in Singapore or abroad, either full- or part-time. Teachers can participate in as many as 100 hours of professional development per year.

**School Leader Development**

Singapore prioritizes developing skilled principals who can ensure that their schools offer high-quality and equitable learning opportunities to their students. Because of Singapore’s career ladder system, teachers choose the leadership track in consultation with their principal in their third year on the job, and then they advance to department head and vice principal. Therefore, all principals were first teachers and then served in two administrative roles before advancing to school leadership. Department heads and other vice principals may participate in the Management and Leadership in Schools Program run by the NIE, which aims to proactively prepare them for the next stage of the leadership track. Vice principals on the verge of being promoted to principals participate in a two-day simulation test and interview process that requires them to demonstrate their capability to respond to real-world scenarios. Those who are selected then go on to the Leaders in Education Program, which incorporates coursework, fieldwork, mentoring, and visits to leaders of other industries and other countries. In Singapore, to prepare vice principals, both the pre-service Leaders in Education Program and the Management and Leadership in Schools Program include training in management theory and practice. Topics studied include “designing and managing learning school organizations” and “building human and intellectual capitals,” so this management training focuses on effective management of professionals rather than on a more Tayloristic form of management.

Singapore balances both mandates and positive incentives for professional development. Cluster superintendents, themselves former principals, are in charge of designing professional development and collaborative learning opportunities for principals in the cluster under their supervision. They also evaluate their principals using the Enhanced Performance Management System, working with the principal to set personal goals for improvement and designing a professional learning plan that will help the principal meet those goals. Principals who have served a minimum of six years are permitted to take one-year sabbaticals on full pay to make international study visits, conduct research and write books, or pursue higher education.

Another way that Singapore supports its principals to develop their skills is through an international school leader exchange program, Building Educational Bridges, which focuses on building leaders’ capacity to innovate by learning more about international education systems’ leadership practices. Principals can apply for Ministry funding to cover the cost of this two-week program, offered through the NIE.

[](http://ncee.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/SingaporeCountryBrief.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_self)

From CIEB's groundbreaking international study of teacher quality, an in-depth look at how Singapore recruits, prepares, develops and retains some of the best teachers in the world.

**USEFUL LINKS**

[Press Release on New Teacher Capacity Building Policy, September 23, 2014](http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2014/09/growing-our-teachers-building-our-nation.php)

[The Ministry of Education Press Release, “New Model for Teachers’ Professional Development Launched,” May 31, 2012](http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2012/05/new-model-for-teachers-profess.php)

[The Ministry of Education Press Release, “New ‘Teach’ Framework to Enhance the Quality of the Teaching Force,”  Mar. 7, 2011](http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2011/03/new-teach-framework-to-enhance-quality-teaching-force.php)

[“TC Creates Joint Master’s Program with Education Institute in Singapore,” TC Media Center, February, 2012](http://www.tc.edu/news.htm?articleID=8377#.T-xhrMzQ8uE.email)

[The Asia Society. (2010). *How Singapore Developed a High Quality Teacher Workforce.*](http://asiasociety.org/education/learning-world/how-singapore-developed-high-quality-teacher-workforce)

[Chong, S. and Ho, P. (2009). “Quality teaching and learning: a quality assurance framework for initial teacher preparation programs.” *International Journal of Management in Education* 3, no. 3/4.  (PDF)](http://www.nie.edu.sg/files/oaqm/FP%20QA%20Framework%20Paper.pdf)

[“Why Singapore is another model for teaching excellence,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, Mar. 24, 2009](http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2009/0324/p12s01-ussc.html)

[The National Institute of Education. (2009). *Educating Teachers for the 21st Century. – Singapore’s teacher education policy.*  (PDF)](http://www.nie.edu.sg/files/about-nie/TE21%20online%20version.pdf)

[International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. (2009). *Do Countries Paying Teachers Higher Relative Salaries Have Higher Student Mathematics Achievement?*  – The report examines how mathematics teachers are paid in 20 countries, and also provides an overview of how teachers are trained and recruited. Singapore is included, see page 140.  (PDF)](http://www.iea.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Electronic_versions/TEDS-M_Cost_Study.pdf)

[Consortium for Policy Research in Education. (2007). *A Comparative Study of Teacher Preparation and Qualifications in Six Nations.* – Ingersoll provides an indepth analysis of teacher training and teacher demographics in six Asian economies, including Singapore (page 71). (PDF)](http://www.cpre.org/images/stories/cpre_pdfs/sixnations_final.pdf)

[The National Institute of Education](http://www.nie.edu.sg/)

[Aspen Institute (2007). *Rethinking Human Capital in Education: Singapore as a Model for Teacher Development.* (PDF)](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/education/SingaporeEDU.pdf)