



Teaching in Focus #22

Who wants to become
a teacher and why?



Teaching & Learning

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- On average across OECD countries, 4.2% of 15-year-old students expect to work as teachers – a greater proportion than the share of teachers in the adult population.
 - In many countries, 15-year-old students who expect to work as teachers have lower mathematics and reading scores than students who expect to work in other professions that, like teaching, require at least a university degree. However, data from the [OECD Survey of Adult Skills](#) show that the numeracy skills of teachers tend to be similar to the numeracy skills of other degree holders.
 - The skills gap between students who expect a career in teaching and those who expect a career as another type of professional is often larger in low-performing versus top-performing countries.
 - Countries with higher teacher salaries (relative to GDP) and higher perceptions of the social value of the teaching profession have, on average, larger shares of students who expect to work as teachers.
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Who aspires to a career in teaching?

A growing awareness that the quality of schooling critically depends on teachers' skills has led to mounting concerns among policy makers about the difficulty of attracting high achieving and motivated candidates into the teaching profession. Concerns are even more significant in countries that suffer from shortages of teachers, or where teacher shortages are worsening over time.

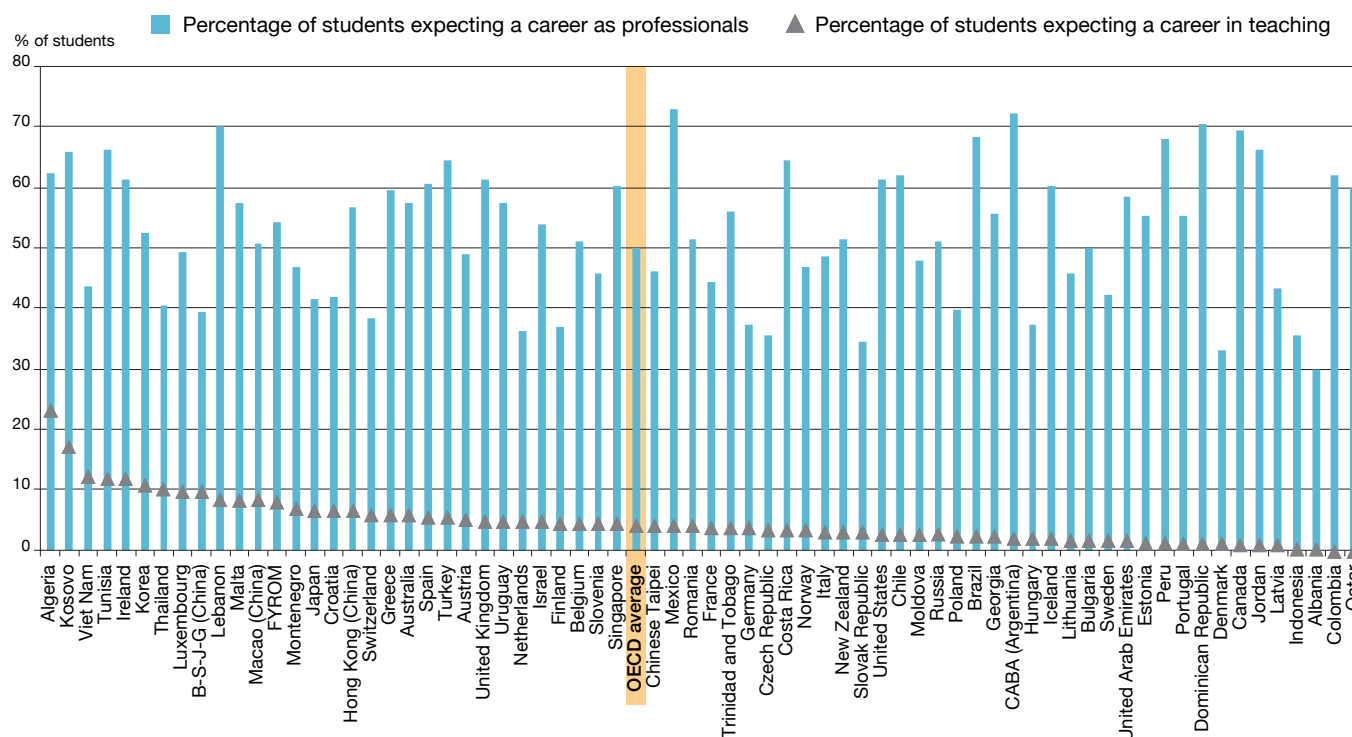
Students' career expectations show how much teenagers, particularly those with high academic potential, consider a career in teaching. Factors that shape early career aspirations greatly determine the overall pool of prospective candidates who will enter the "teaching pipeline", even though alternative pathways that enable adults to enter the profession at any point in their lives can mitigate the influence of these factors.

An analysis of 2015 data from the [Programme for International Student Assessment](#) (PISA) examines differences between countries regarding the extent to which 15-year-old students, high-achieving students and students with non-traditional profiles expect to work as teachers. It also attempts to explain these differences between countries by relating them to the social status, monetary compensation and working conditions enjoyed by teachers in different countries.

This analysis relies on a single question directed at 15-year-old students in the PISA 2006 and 2015 surveys: "What kind of job do you expect to have when you are about 30 years old?" The analysis focuses on students who indicate that they expect to work as teachers in general, or, specifically, as primary, secondary or special education teachers.

On average, 50% of students in OECD countries report that they expect to work as professionals, a category that comprises high status occupations that typically require a university degree. Among these, 4.2% of all students expect to work as teachers (Figure 1). By comparison, the number of teachers in primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education represented around 2.4% of the labour force across OECD countries in 2013. This means that, in general, the share of students expecting a teaching career is larger than the share of working-age people who are teaching today. At this early stage of career orientation, however, it cannot be concluded that there is a general lack of candidates for a career in teaching. In fact, teaching, like healthcare, enjoys a clear advantage over other occupations: all 15-year-olds know that teaching exists, and they all have had some contact with teachers and have at least an approximate idea of what they do and of their working conditions.

Figure 1. Students who expect to work as teachers



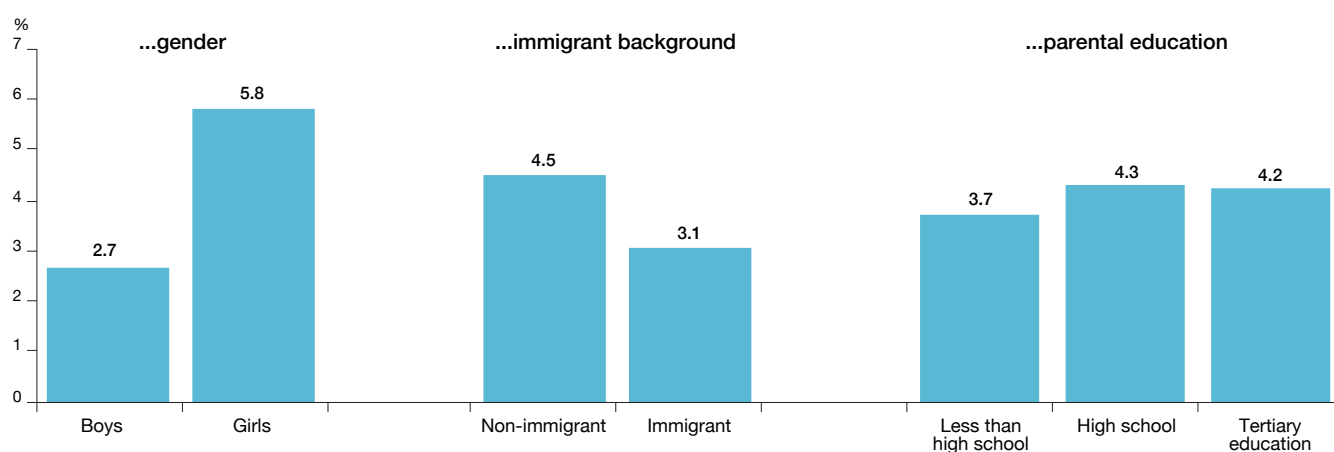
Notes: Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of 15-year-old students who expect to be working in the teaching profession when they are 30 years old. Professionals include scientists, engineers, medical professionals, teachers, and business, legal, social science and related professionals. FYROM: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Source: OECD (2018), *Effective Teacher Policies: Insights from PISA*, PISA, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264301603-en>, Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

The percentage of students who expect to have a career as a teacher varies widely across countries. The teaching profession appears to be particularly sought after in Algeria, Beijing-Shanghai-Jiangsu-Guangdong (China), Ireland, Korea, Kosovo, Luxembourg, Thailand, Tunisia and Viet Nam. By contrast, the teaching profession attracts less than 1.5% of 15-year-olds in Albania, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Indonesia, Jordan, Latvia, Peru, Portugal, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Figure 2. Aspiration to a teaching career, by student characteristics

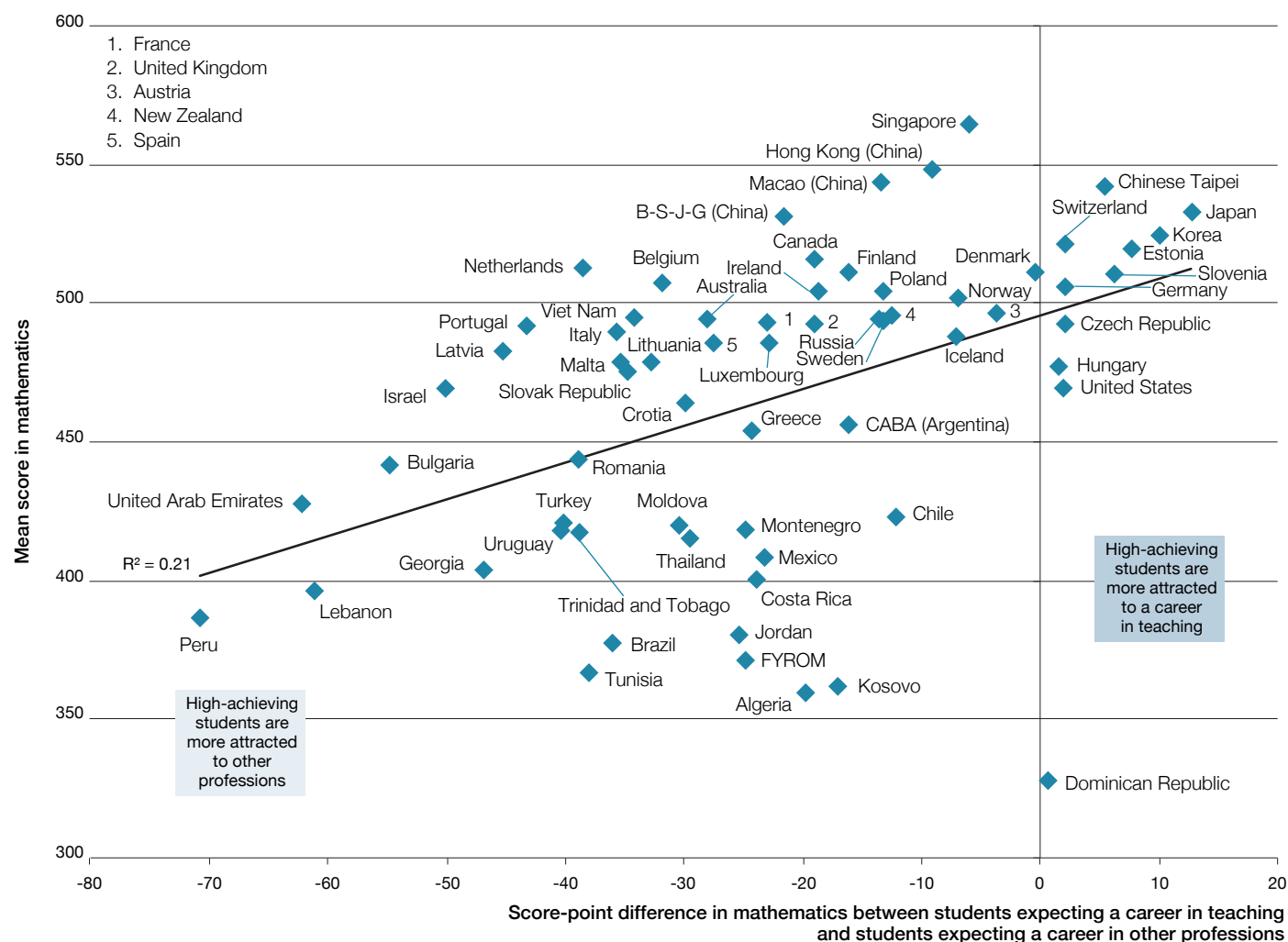
Percentage of students expecting to work as teachers (OECD average), by ...



Source: OECD (2018), *Effective Teacher Policies: Insights from PISA*, PISA, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264301603-en>, Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

The typical student expecting a career in teaching is, in most countries, a girl with no immigrant background (Figure 2). Furthermore, in many countries, students who expect to work as teachers have lower mathematics and reading scores in PISA than students who expect to work in other professions that, like teaching, require at least a university degree. And the skills gap between students who expect a career in teaching and those who expect a career as another type of professional tends to be larger in low-performing countries than in top-performing countries (Figure 3). This echoes long-held concerns about the composition of the teaching workforce: in many countries, fewer high achievers and fewer men choose to become, or to remain, teachers. However, data from the [OECD Survey of Adult Skills](#) show that the numeracy skills of teachers tend to be similar to the numeracy skills of other degree holders.

Figure 3. In what countries are high-achieving students attracted to teaching?



Source: OECD, PISA 2015 database; OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*, PISA, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en>, Table I.5.3; OECD (2018), *Effective Teacher Policies: Insights from PISA*, PISA, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264301603-en>, Table 4.3.

How to attract more and more-qualified candidates?

Faced with issues of teacher shortages, recruitment challenges, and concerns about the social standing of the teaching profession, policy makers need to know how to attract more candidates, particularly those who are more qualified, to the teaching profession. In-service teacher surveys often show that current teachers are highly motivated by the intrinsic benefits of teaching – working with children and helping them develop, and making a contribution to society – while studies that survey large pools of graduates about their career choices show that the relative salaries of graduate occupations play a role in their choices: had teachers' salaries been higher, more “potential teachers” would have seriously considered a career in teaching.

PISA and the [Teaching and Learning International Survey](#) (TALIS) data have been analysed to relate the share of students expecting a career in teaching to student and school characteristics and to country-level differences in teachers' pay (relative to GDP) and social status. At the country level, results indicate that both teachers' salaries and the social status of the teaching profession are positively associated with students' expectations of working as teachers. Teachers' salaries and the social status of the teaching profession are related in different ways to students' expectations of a teaching career, depending on the students' academic proficiency and certain characteristics, namely gender, socio economic status, immigrant background and mathematics performance. Results indicate that boys are more sensitive to salary differences, but there is no evidence that higher salaries would attract high-achieving students into the teaching profession to a greater extent than low-achieving students.

The bottom line

There are more students expecting a teaching career than there are teachers in the current population. Education systems could, therefore, do more to encourage and support the pursuit of a teaching career among all motivated students. To promote teaching as a career, in particular for top-performing students, job quality matters at least as much as pay. Transforming the work organisation of schools, involving teachers in school decision making, enhancing their leadership responsibilities and promoting teaching as a demanding, but fulfilling, profession are promising policy levers.

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To learn more

OECD (2018), *Effective Teacher Policies: Insights from PISA*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264301603-en>.

OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*, PISA, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en>.

OECD, PISA 2015 database, <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2015database/>.

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