



Pearson

# Japan: What makes an effective teacher?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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# Executive Summary



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The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.

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BARBER & MOURSHED, 2007

Decades of research make it clear: teachers make a difference in student learning. In fact, Stanford University economist Eric Hanushek (1992) has noted that the difference between a good and a bad teacher can be a full level of achievement in a single school year. Given the strength of these findings, nations around the world recognize that in order to improve educational outcomes and equity they must focus on effectiveness of teachers. A critical step toward achieving that goal is for individual countries to identify the competencies required for effectiveness and use them to inform teaching standards, pre-service teacher preparation, professional development programs and performance evaluations. To make an impact, those systems and processes will need to be based on a common understanding, within each country, of what it means to be an effective teacher.

**Oxfam’s international study of teacher competences and standards concludes that in order to build that common understanding, it is “absolutely necessary that the question as to what is considered a quality educator is investigated among stakeholders” ( Bourgonje & Tromp, 2011, p. 145).** Giving stakeholders a voice not only allows us to understand how they think and feel about a topic; it provides an opportunity to help frame important policy decisions that directly impact their lives. Pearson is therefore surveying students, teachers, principals, education researchers, policymakers and parents in 23 countries regarding their perceptions of what it takes to be an effective teacher. Pearson is comparing the views expressed by these stakeholders with both current government teaching standards and research on effective teaching.

This report, the eleventh in the series, summarizes the results of the survey conducted in Japan, which, for decades, has been regarded as a model for education due to consistently high student achievement on international tests. In the global report, 23 participating countries are compared not only across stakeholder groups, but by country as well.

### The Survey

To learn the top qualities education stakeholders in Japan seek in their teachers, we administered surveys across the country (see **Table A2** in the Appendix). The stakeholder groups include:

- Students ages 15-19
- Parents of K-12 students
- K-12 (primary and secondary) teachers
- K-12 (primary and secondary) administrators
- Education researchers and policymakers

Respondents were asked to list, in their own words, between three and fifteen qualities that they feel are most important in making an “effective” teacher and to indicate what type of teacher, by subject(s) and grade level(s), they were thinking about while creating their list. The survey did not define “effective” for respondents, other than that it meant “good,” allowing respondents to define what an effective teacher meant for themselves. We developed a coding system to categorize responses, based on prior research about competencies of effective teachers. This coding scheme was reviewed by teachers, principals, education policymakers and researchers and revised iteratively as additional responses were coded, resulting in a final list of 32 categories.

### The Most Important Qualities of Teachers in Japan

We found surprising consistency in how the groups of surveyed stakeholders responded when they were asked to list between 3 and 15 of what they believed to be the most important qualities or competencies of effective teachers. The most common response across the full sample was that effective teachers need to build trusting, compassionate *Relationships* with their students. It was also the most common response when comparing elementary, middle, and high school grade levels, private and public schools, and males and females.

The second and third most common responses across all stakeholder groups were professionalism and knowledge of students. *Professionalism* focuses on workplace practices and responsibility as a professional (e.g., being respectful and honest), including knowledge of rules and regulations. *Knowledge of Learners* involves regarding students as individuals and understanding their individual learning needs and how they learn and develop.

### Most Important Qualities of Teachers in Japan

1	Ability to Develop Trusting, Productive Relationships
2	Professionalism
3	Knowledge of Learners
4	Ability to Make Ideas and Content Clear
5	Patient, Caring, Kind Personality
6	Dedication to Teaching
7	Classroom Management
8	Subject Matter Knowledge
9	Ability to Engage Students in Learning
10	Teaching Skills/Pedagogical Practices

When the responses of all stakeholder groups are combined, the other seven categories in the Top 10 qualities or competencies mentioned, were, in descending order:

- Ability to *Make Ideas and Content Clear* to enhance understanding and learning
- *Patient, Caring* and kind personality
- *Dedication* to teaching and students' success
- Ability to create and manage a productive learning environment (*Classroom Management*)
- Deep content or *Subject Matter Knowledge*
- Ability to *Engage* students and motivate them to learn
- Strong *Teaching Skills* and use of effective pedagogical methods

Eight of the Top 10 most frequent responses for each group of stakeholders were shared by all groups and include trusting relationships with students, professionalism, knowledge of students, making ideas, content clear patience and caring, dedication, classroom management, and subject knowledge. Additionally, stakeholders associated with public and private schools shared all of their Top 10 response categories, in varying order, with both groups valuing building relationships with students as the most important quality. When addressing the qualities most valued for an elementary, middle, or high school teacher, respondents also shared all of their Top 10, again in varying order, with building relationships as the most important quality. These results reflect that the

qualities most valued were not specific to grade level taught. Male and female respondents shared all of their Top 10 most valued qualities, with the ability to build relationships valued most.

The categories of qualities mentioned most often across the entire sample reflect how strongly education stakeholders in Japan value dispositions of relatedness, responsiveness, and character in their teachers. There is research that supports the link between these dispositions, teacher effectiveness, and student outcomes. The dispositions of effective teachers are characterized as the bridge between a teacher's capabilities (what they know and CAN do) and the actions they take (what they choose to do).

Overall, the survey responses align well with research on effective teaching, and with Japan's *General Current Curriculum Guidelines* for public school teachers outlined by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, and Science and Technology (MEXT). But there were a few significant gaps between what the educator stakeholder groups (teachers, principals, researchers, and policymakers) valued most and what research tells us matters most in enhancing student learning. Few educators addressed the importance of knowledge and use of *Assessment* to evaluate and track student progress. Yet researchers suggest that this is the single most important aspect of teaching practice to enhance student learning. Also, few referenced making learning *Challenging* and rigorous for all students, in the belief that all can learn. A "watered-down" curriculum, in fact, has been shown to increase drop-out, repeating grades, and/or needing remediation. Additionally, there was surprisingly little mention of focusing on *Deeper Learning*, and no mention of using *Technology* to enhance learning, both of which have garnered strong interest among teacher groups, researchers and policymakers globally.

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### Implications

The greater emphasis placed on teacher dispositions of caring and character reflect a strong focus on the dispositions required for effective teaching. Dispositions are considered to be the bridge between what a teacher is able to do and what he or she chooses to do. These findings among Japanese education stakeholders may reflect the belief that without these critical dispositions, teaching-specific knowledge and skills are insufficient to foster effective learning. This study offers an opportunity for Japan to evaluate teacher effectiveness policies and the impact on the quality of the teaching workforce. Ultimately, the survey results reaffirm the notion that, at its foundation, learning is a social enterprise, and effective teaching is about trusting relationships between teachers and students that foster student success, as these communities define it.

### Using These Results to Improve Teaching Practice in Japan

We recommend that the results of this survey be used to inform and guide the definition of what it means to be an effective teacher in the teaching and learning contexts of Japan. Moreover, the results can inform discussions about teacher preparation, hiring, training, and evaluation, particularly in light of the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) results showing that Japanese teachers have a lower sense of self-efficacy and perceived value of their work than the TALIS average.

Given the stakeholders' emphasis on the importance of teacher-student relationships, teacher training programs could place greater emphasis on dispositions that stakeholders believe are essential for effectiveness, such as patience, compassion, passion for the work, and responsibility. Cognitive science tells us that these relationships are critical to fostering effective learning, and thus this finding should be taken seriously. The programs could assess these qualities in candidates, counsel candidates on career fit and provide training to develop and enhance teaching dispositions in future teachers. **As other researchers have noted, focusing on improving the social relationship that is at the heart of student learning should lead to improvements in a wide range of student outcomes in schools.**

Likewise, training programs may want to emphasize the knowledge and skills that were mentioned less frequently but have been shown to be critical to effective teaching and student learning, such as assessment of student progress and provision of a challenging, rigorous curriculum for all students, with an emphasis on the learning process and the integration of technology for learning.

While this research identifies many different qualities and competencies of effective teachers, we caution against using the results to generate a checklist approach under the misguided belief that there is a single winning pattern of competencies to be an effective teacher. Finally, it cannot be overstated that to be effective teachers, the work conditions and environment, first and foremost, must be well managed; school context and community culture have a profound influence on the way different teacher roles and competencies are understood, prioritized, and practiced.

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