

# Singapore Country Summary

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**This report was written by the Singapore Ministry of Education. We are grateful to our Singapore country representatives for this contribution to the meeting given that we did not have an OECD Country Background Report on Singapore’s teacher policies. Some additional information may be found at the ministry’s website: [www.moe.gov.sg](http://www.moe.gov.sg)**

## Singapore Country Summary—General Facts and Information

**Population:** Approx. 4.4 million

**Education expenditures:**

- As a percentage of GDP: 3.6%
- Average annual per pupil expenditure in US dollars (includes primary, secondary and non-tertiary): \$3326

**Teacher demographics: (~ 27,000 teachers)**

- Gender distribution (% female):
  - Primary: 82.7%
  - Secondary: 66.5%
  - Junior college/centralized institute : 57.7%
- Salary after 15 years experience (equivalent US \$): \$55,000 (estimated)
- Trends:
  - Median age of teachers is falling (approx. 33 years in 2006).

**Student demographics: (~530,000 students)**

- In public institutions: >98%
  - <2% in private regular school, privately funded school and special education school
- Graduation rate (Secondary): 97.4%

**Structure of the education system:**

- Governance:
  - Ministry of Education manages school system under direction of Minister for Education
- Teacher employment:
  - Teachers are employed by Ministry of Education
  - Initial teacher training involves a 4-year degree course or a one-year postgraduate diploma in education for recruits without teacher training
- Average class size:
  - Primary: ~36
  - Secondary: ~37

**Curriculum and Assessment:**

- Schools are required to largely follow a national curriculum, although there is room for autonomy for certain levels (especially Pri 1 and 2) and certain schools (e.g. some schools are using the International Baccalaurate instead of GCE 'O' and 'A' Levels)
- Specific statutory requirements for some subjects, e.g. English, Mother Tongue Language, Maths, Science, Humanities
- National assessments for students at key intervals.

## Current Education Reform Context

This section summarizes current education reform initiatives in order to provide context for the discussion of teacher policy initiatives that follows.

### Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (1997)

- The Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (TSLN) Framework stressed 4 major thrusts:
  - Emphasis on critical and creative thinking;
  - Use of information technology;
  - Citizenship education through National Education (NE); and
  - Interdisciplinary Project Work.
- Interdisciplinary Project Work was introduced to encourage pupils to develop the critical and creative thinking skills required for effective contribution in the workplace.
- Teachers were trained to use various IT platforms such as educational software, PowerPoint and the Internet to enhance the learning experience of pupils.
- The Community Involvement Programme (CIP) was also introduced to schools in the 1990s, to inculcate in pupils a sense of belonging to the community and encourage them to contribute to a worthy cause in their community.
- The School Excellence Model (SEM) was introduced in 1999 to improve school appraisal. The SEM approach emphasises a total quality approach to school appraisal which enables schools to look at the school organisation- its management, operations and outcomes, from a systemic point of view. Schools conduct self-appraisal annually and are subject to external validation every few years. This approach aids schools in seeking continuous improvement.
- Teachers' competency levels had to be raised to meet the demands of the wide-ranging changes in the education system.

### Innovation and Enterprise drive (2004) and Teach Less, Learn More Movement (2005)

- The move from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based one required a strong emphasis on nurturing a spirit of innovation and enterprise (I&E) in schools.
- For teachers to role-model active and continuous learning, the Teachers' Work Attachment (TWA) was set up to give teachers exposure to working environments outside of their schools.
- At the centre of the I&E drive is the need for teachers to model the I&E spirit through innovative pedagogies. In 2005, the Teach Less, Learn More (TLLM) drive was started to encourage frontline educators to re-examine the fundamental questions of the teaching and learning process, and innovate in their curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment.
- Learner-centred pedagogies are actively promoted to teachers, for example:
  - the SEED (Strategies for Effective Engagement and Development of Pupils in Primary School) Movement for Primary 1 and 2- school-driven efforts to improve the level of engagement in the Primary 1 and 2 classrooms,
  - SAIL (Strategies for Active and Independent Learning) Movement for Secondary schools.
- Teachers now take on enhanced roles of curriculum designers and pedagogy innovators.
- Strong emphasis is placed on teachers' continuous reflection as key to professional growth. Teachers are encouraged to carry out action research and attend preferred courses of study.

## Singapore Teacher Policy Highlights

### Attracting and Supporting New Teachers

#### *Recruitment:*

- Teacher salaries are reviewed regularly to ensure they remain competitive.
- Introduction of CONNECT (CONtiNuity, Experience and Commitment in Teaching) Plan in 2001. CONNECT Plan is a gratuity scheme with yearly contributions and payouts to teachers on a regular interval. This scheme encourages loyalty to the Education Service. Annual contribution rates were revised upwards in 2006.
- Recruits pursuing teaching degrees are fully sponsored during their degree course. In return, they serve a bond upon graduation.
- Recruits without teaching degrees receive full pay while pursuing a postgraduate diploma in education. In return, they serve a three-year bond upon completion of training.
- Pay of mid-career entrants is currently under review.

#### *Induction:*

- Teachers have short practicum periods during their initial teacher training.
- Teachers have reduced teaching load of 80% during the first year.
- Structured Mentoring Programme introduced in 2006. A beginning teacher is paired with an experienced teacher who has reduced teaching load in order to guide and mentor the beginning teacher.
- Schools have school-based induction programmes to ease teachers into schools.

### Improving Schools as Places to Work and Learn

#### *Ongoing Professional Development:*

- Many opportunities are available for teachers to continue their professional development while in service:
  - Professional Development Leave for experienced teachers (12 months of half-pay leave of which 5 could be converted to 2½ months of full-pay sabbatical leave for teachers with 12 years of experience, up to 6 months of half-pay leave for teachers with 6 years of experience)
  - Undergraduate Study Leave scheme for non-graduate teachers
  - Postgraduate Scholarships for outstanding teachers
  - Other forms of financial assistance for teachers to pursue higher degrees
  - Professional Development Continuum Model for Graduate Teachers- Provisions for modular approach with different pathways for teachers to attain different qualifications
  - Other opportunities for professional development include in-service courses, Learning Circles, Work Attachments and Action Research opportunities.
  - Self-directed online learning through the Virtual Institute of Teaching And Learning (VITAL) portal.

- Establishment of Teachers' Network (TN) as a hub for teachers' professional development. TN has a library, conducts teacher-led workshops and facilitates learning circles among teachers.
- Teachers can track their own development activities through an online portal, TRAISI.
- Schools support teachers' professional development through performance management process. The Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS)- a competency-based performance management system- was introduced in 2003 to provide clear guidance to education officers to guide their development. Competencies are different for each of the 3 career tracks- teaching track, leadership track and senior specialist track.
- New Learning & Development Scheme introduced in 2006. Teachers can claim up to \$400 or \$700 per year (depending on years of service), for any personal or professional development expenses.
- Position of School Staff Developer (SSD) to be introduced progressively in schools from 2007 to ensure that the training and professional development programmes are customised to our teacher's needs, and to mentor and coach teachers.

#### *Improving the working environment in Schools:*

- Extension of Part-Time Teaching Scheme (PTTS) to both female and male married officers with children under 12 years of age in 2006 [Previously, PTTS was available only to females officers with children under 6 years of age].
- To reduce administrative workload of teachers, various support staff are being recruited and deployed to schools:
  - Vice-Principal (Administration) to oversee administration of school,
  - Full-time School Counsellors in every school to provide counselling to students with socio-emotional needs,
  - Special Needs Officers to support the integration of dyslexic and autistic children
  - Co-curricular Programme Executives to provide administrative support for co-curricular activities
  - Administration Managers and Operations Managers and clerical staff.
- Recruiting and deploying an additional 3,000 teachers. This will reduce teacher-student ratio in all schools.
- Creating opportunities for schools with good practices in promoting work-life harmony to share the practices with other schools.

#### Improving Pay and Career Opportunities

##### *Different Career Tracks:*

- Teachers can aspire to move up 3 different career tracks (summarised in the diagram in Annex A):
  - Teaching Track for teachers wishing to focus on classroom teaching;
  - Leadership Track for teachers aspiring towards leadership of departments, schools and beyond; and

- Senior Specialist Track for teachers who choose to become specialists in an area of education, e.g. curriculum development, pastoral care and guidance, educational psychology, etc.
- The different career tracks cater to teachers with differing strengths and have different performance expectations as spelt out in the EPMS.
- Lateral movement between tracks is possible, allowing teachers flexibility to explore different tracks to see if they are compatible with their own strengths.

*Performance-based Pay:*

- Although the pay scales are largely based on years of experience in service, there are different pay scales to reflect teachers' levels of competencies, as well as their potential to hold higher appointments.
- This is coupled with an annual performance-based bonus system, where outstanding teachers can get up to two or more months' bonus.
- There are annual awards for outstanding individual and team contributions in every school, with substantial monetary incentives.
- More salary grades have been added in 2006 for classroom teachers and Master Teachers. Classroom teachers now have a fourth salary grade, while Master Teachers (who contribute at the zonal or national level towards raising teachers' competencies) have a new grade of Master Teacher Level 2. An additional salary grade was also created for Heads of Department in 2006.
- Where teachers on the leadership track were holding greater responsibilities but were serving at grades lower than their Establishment grade (usually due to lack of seniority), they were paid additional annual Responsibility Allowances.

## **Focus on Current Initiative- Different Career Tracks for Singapore Education Officers**

### **Teaching Track**

The Teaching Track caters to the majority of Education Officers. It provides professional development and advancement opportunities for teachers who make teaching excellence in the classroom the primary focus in their careers. In general, all education officers start their career in the Education Service on the Teaching Track as classroom teachers.

#### **Master Teacher/ Senior Teacher**

The Master Teacher Level 2 is the pinnacle appointment of the Teaching Track. A Master Teacher Level 2 operates at the National or Zonal Level. A Master Teacher operates at the cluster level and assists schools within the cluster. The Master Teacher's main role is to provide advice and guidance to the teachers within the cluster and help introduce new methodologies in teaching pedagogy and subject areas.

The Master Teacher is appointed on a fixed term of 3 years, which can be renewed. The Cluster Superintendent, in consultation with Principals in the cluster, will decide the deployment of Master Teachers. This could include deploying the Master Teacher to teach in a particular school in the cluster for a period of time (a term, semester or a year). The Master Teacher's lessons would be model lessons for other teachers in the cluster to observe and learn from.

The Senior Teacher job grade is pegged at one level below that of the Master Teacher. The Senior Teacher serves as a mentor and role model for teachers within the school.

The Senior Teacher and Master Teacher are key positions on the Teaching Track. Hence, a formal accreditation system has been implemented for teachers who wish to take on these positions. Teachers identified for placement at these higher levels must satisfy various criteria (e.g. in terms of submitting a portfolio to demonstrate that they have the skills, knowledge and competencies for the job).

### **Accreditation For Master Teacher & Senior Teacher Appointment**

Officers who wish to progress to higher levels of Master and Senior Teacher appointments will need to meet thresholds in terms of knowledge, skills, performance and competencies for the job. They must demonstrate that they have strong teaching skills and subject knowledge and will have to go through an accreditation process.

### **Accreditation Standards**

Officers aspiring for the Master and Senior Teacher appointments must meet the accreditation standards for the positions. The accreditation standards are in the following 5 key aspects. These standards will be assessed via a professional portfolio.

- a. Professional development
- b. Quality learning of pupils
- c. Character development and well-being of pupils
- d. Contributions to school organisation and development
- e. Collaboration with parents and community groups

### **Accreditation Process**

Officers who wish to take up Master and Senior Teacher appointments need to go through the accreditation process, which involves nomination, submission of professional portfolio, evaluation and selection panel interview.

### **Professional Portfolio**

The professional portfolio is a key element of the accreditation process. Officers have to submit a professional portfolio to show that they have satisfied the accreditation standards. The portfolio has 3 basic elements:

- a. Personal statement on taking up the higher appointment
- b. Summary of evidence through the description of factual experiences within the past 3 years to satisfy each accreditation standard
- c. Supporting data and outputs to substantiate evidence (e.g. term/ weekly lesson plans, presentations, etc.)

### **Leadership Track**

The Leadership Track is the track for leadership positions in the schools and HQ and is the track leading to the apex job in the Education Service, the Director-General of Education position. Teachers who have demonstrated their ability to take on leadership responsibilities can look forward to positions such as Subject Head/ Level Head, Heads of Department, Vice-Principal and Principal. They may also be posted to Ministry Headquarters (HQ) to take on leadership positions.

### **Senior Specialist Track**

The Senior Specialist Track aims to develop a strong core of officers at HQ with deep knowledge and skills in specific areas in Education. The 4 specialist clusters are:

- a. Curriculum & Instructional Design:
  - Curriculum & Instructional Design Specialist Track

Offers specialisation in the development of curricular and instructional programmes for schools. Expertise may be anchored in curricular and instructional design subjects (languages, mathematics, humanities, etc), co-curricular activities (sports, etc), different student levels (pre-

school, etc) or other niche areas in the relevant field (IT in teaching & learning, reading & literacy).

b. Educational Psychology and Guidance:

- Educational Psychologist Track
- Guidance Specialist Track

Offers specialisation in the provision of psychological and guidance support, and advice to students of varied abilities and ages catering to different learning, emotional and social needs. Expertise may be anchored in specific student learning stages (pre-school, young children, etc), unique needs of students, and specific educational, psychological and guidance approaches or other niche areas in the relevant field.

c. Educational Testing and Measurement; and

- Educational Assessment Specialist Track
- Educational Psychometrician Track

Offers specialisation in the design, development and evaluation of tests and assessments. Expertise may be anchored in different assessment modes and methodologies, psychometrics and measurement, or other niche areas in the relevant field.

d. Educational Research and Statistics.

- Educational Research & Statistics Specialist Track

Offers specialisation in the area of research and statistics to support development and evaluation of education policies and programmes. Expertise may be anchored in specific research approaches and methodologies, or other niche areas in the relevant field.

### **Flexibility Across Tracks**

There is flexibility for lateral movements across the 3 career tracks. Officers can choose to move across the different career tracks, e.g. Head of Department to Senior Teacher, Teaching to Senior Specialist, etc., as long as they satisfy the standards and criteria (e.g. qualifications, accreditation, etc) of the job/ career track they want to enter.

Officers who have been teaching in schools and are keen to progress on the Leadership can take on middle management positions in schools, e.g. Head of Department, Subject Head and Level Head positions while others who are interested in the Specialist Track can apply for posting to MOE HQ to try out specific specialist jobs. Officers, who choose to remain on the Teaching Track, can aspire to be Senior Teachers or Master Teachers.

Different Career Tracks for Singapore Education Officers

## Career Advancement

