

A scenic autumn landscape featuring a dirt path that curves through a grassy area. Several trees with vibrant red, orange, and yellow foliage are scattered throughout the scene. In the background, a calm lake reflects the sky, and a dense forest of trees is visible under a clear blue sky. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

# RAISING ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN FINLAND: LOCALLY ORGANISED SUPPORT FOR ALL LEARNERS

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Ministry of National Education  
Warszawa 7.10.2016

# CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

- The Centre for Educational Assessment at the University of Helsinki has since 1996 developed measures for assessing learning to learn (LTL) and to implement large-scale national and municipal educational assessment projects.

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# ASSESSMENT PROJECTS

- Currently the centre works on several longitudinal computer-based large-scale assessment studies (N = 1000 – 14 000) on learning to learn and the development of learning outcomes and wellbeing in basic education and upper secondary school.
  - All projects focus on educational equity.
  - In addition to individual, class and school level development, the projects address the effectiveness of the school- and municipal level resources and structures for support and student welfare work in schools.
- Involved in the national implementation of the computer-based PISA2015 and PISA2018 assessments in Finland.
- A new study for monitoring tablet computer use in one municipality that bought tablets for almost every student.

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# PROJECTS RELATED TO THE SUPPORT SYSTEM AND SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

- Developing evaluation of the implementation of the new special education strategy in over 300 municipalities 2007-2011.
- A follow-up study of the effects of the 2011 basic educational legislation reform (the new support system) in the whole country.
- Development of a computerised adaptive learning preparedness test for student selection of vocational upper secondary schools for students with different kinds of special education needs and support needs.
  - Since 2015, the test has been in nationwide use in almost all vocational upper secondary schools in Finland.
  - The main aim is to find everyone a study programme that would best correspond to their strengths and potential.

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- Finnish basic education is based on the idea of equity and equality regardless of the background or the special needs of the pupils... (Aho et al., 2006)
- ... and the most important way for securing this is to organise support for (almost) all learners in the local school.  
(Ministry of Education , 2007)





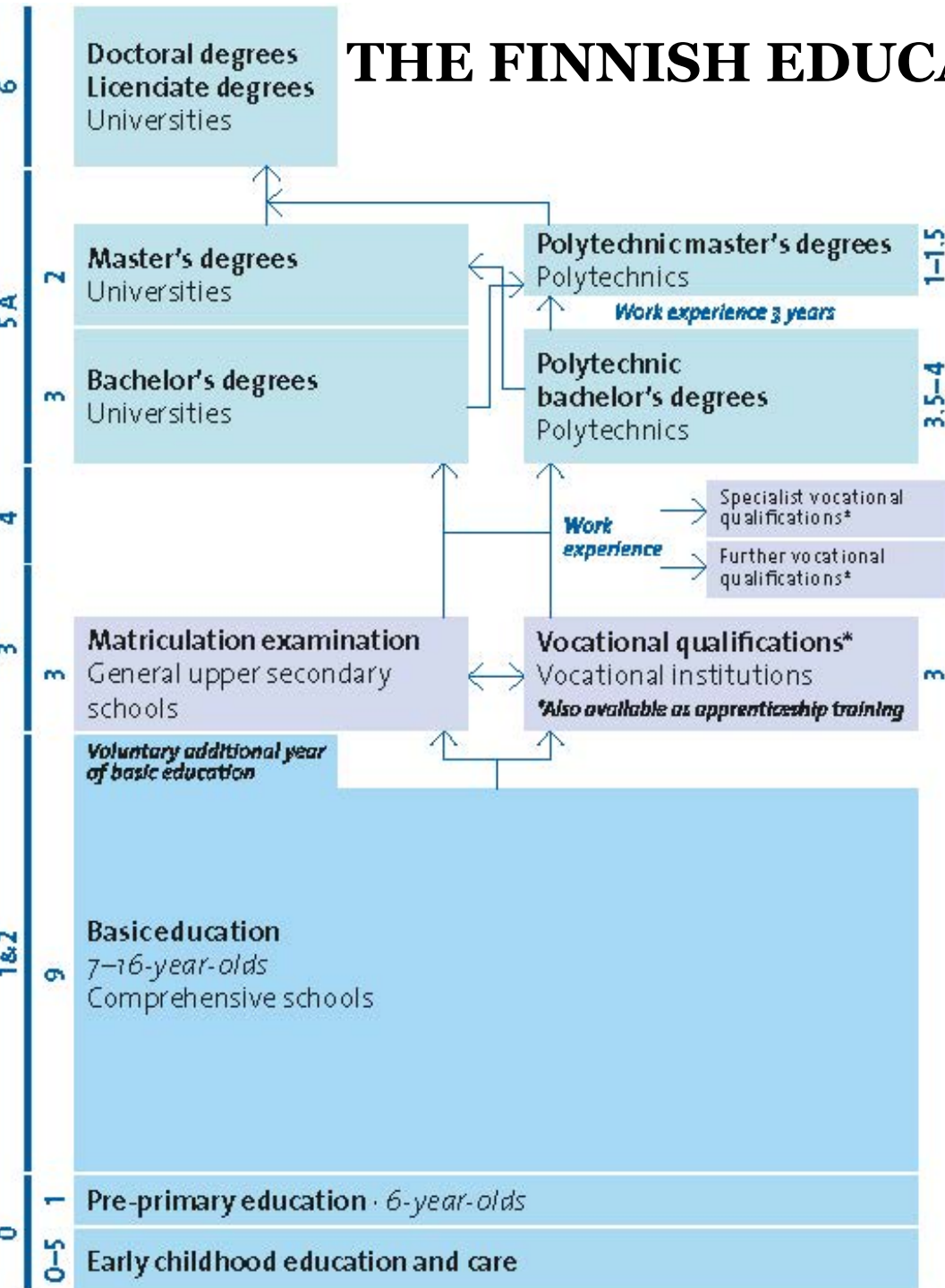
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# The Finnish educational system



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# THE FINNISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM



- The results of large-scale international comparisons support the view that the Finnish basic education system supports both equity and equality of education (Willms, 2010).
- There is no tracking and very little school selection until the end of lower secondary education.

Source of the Figure:  
Ministry of Education and Culture

## EDUCATIONAL REFORM 2007-2011

- Even if equity and equality have been the cornerstones of our educational system since the basic education reform in the 1970s, special needs education was, until recently, largely organised in segregated settings.
- In 2006, the total percentage of special education referrals was as high as 8%, and approximately half of the pupils were taught in segregated classes in mainstream schools or special schools.

A reform of educational legislation took place in Finland in 2010, mainly to counteract the growing number of special education referrals.

- To give municipalities, as the organisers of education, a possibility to be prepared for the 2010 change of legislation, a Special Education Strategy (SPES) was launched by the Ministry of Education in 2007.



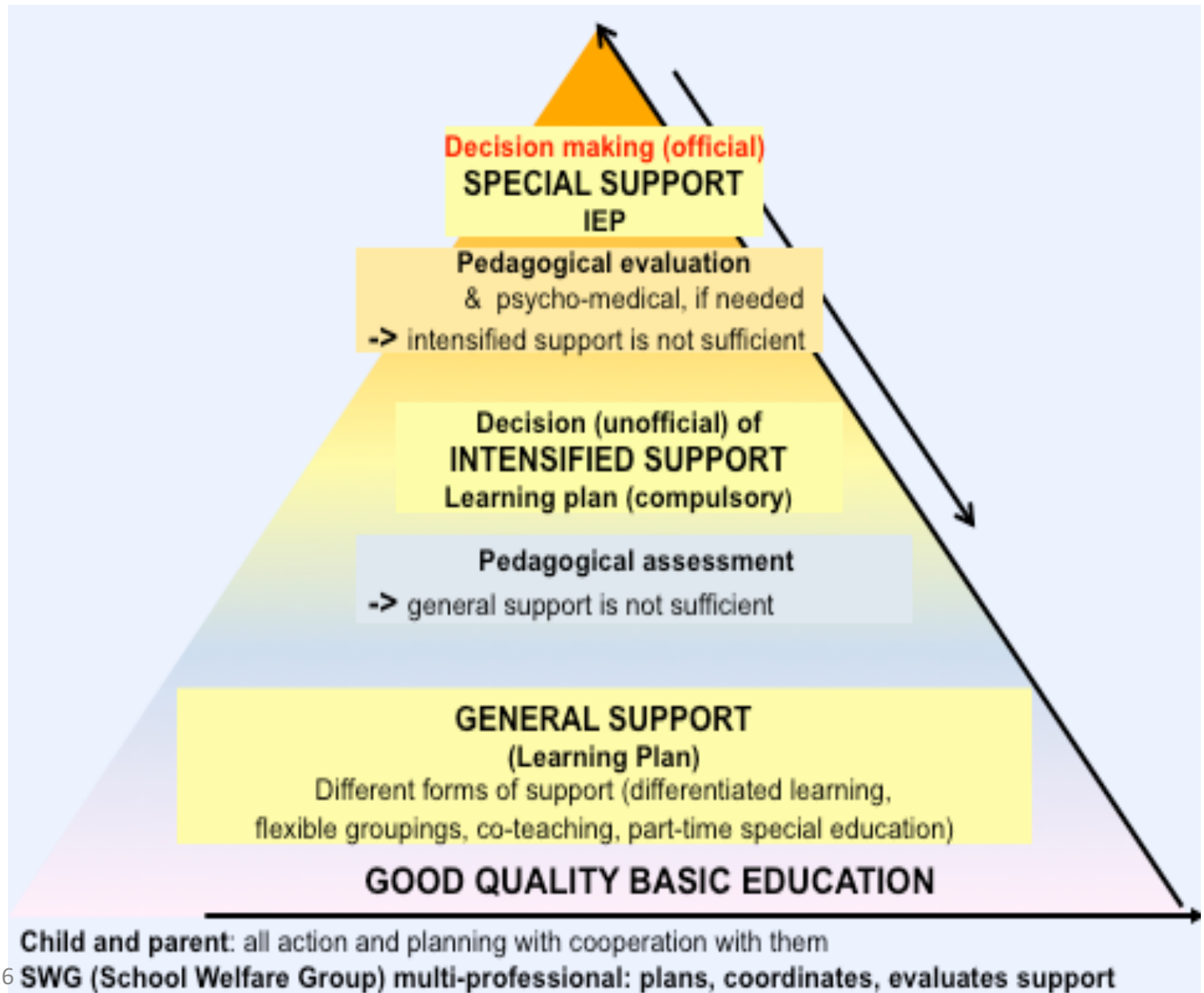


# EDUCATIONAL REFORM 2007-2011

- During the reform, a three-tiered support model was introduced and implemented in an extensive project for developing practices in almost all Finnish municipalities.
- The new model strengthened the role of local schools in organising support for all learners, including pupils with high special education needs.
- The model also stressed early intervention and a pedagogical approach instead of former psychological and medical ones.
- Preventive multiprofessional student welfare and collaboration were strongly emphasised.
- For a detailed description of the model, see:  
Thuneberg, H., Vainikainen, M.-P., Ahtiainen, R., Lintuvuori, M., Salo, K. & Hautamäki, J. (2013). Education is special for all: The Finnish support model. *Gemeinsam leben*, 2/2013, 67-78.

# THE FINNISH SUPPORT MODEL

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# Means of support



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# PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT

- Sabel, Saxenian, Fredriksen, Miettinen & Hautamäki (2011) conceptualised the Finnish educational system as an individualised service system, identifying two aspects:
  - local experiences and innovations can be supported when simultaneously following the national orders, and
  - the work of part-time special education teachers.
- Part-time special education teachers work in every school without having an own class to teach. Instead, they are there for all pupils to work preventatively and to react as soon as any concerns arise. The focus is particularly on lower grades.
- Other support means are, for instance, remedial teaching, differentiation, flexible grouping, co-teaching, language (both mother tongue and Finnish language) teaching for pupils with an immigrant background at all stages of the support model.
  - Most support means have been in active use since 1970s.

# STUDENT WELFARE WORK

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- Finland defines student welfare work by legislation.
- All Finnish pupils have access to the services of a psychologist, a social worker, a school nurse and a medical doctor, in addition to the support organised by the school staff, which includes special education teachers and student counsellors.
- The work is organised through regular meetings of multiprofessional teams - also teachers participate when necessary.
  - Organising student welfare services through on-site teams, better results can be gained both from a qualitative and a quantitative perspective.  
(e.g. Iversen & al., 2006; Walker & al., 2010; Rubinson, 2002)
- After the reform, the focus has been on developing school- and community-level work and consultative approaches.
- For more information, see:



## WHAT NEXT?

- The Finnish core curriculum was reformed recently and the schools have been implementing it gradually since August.
  - In addition to the support structures that were introduced already earlier, the core curriculum introduced new overarching principles (e.g., enhancing domain-general thinking skills and metacognition, ICT literacy, collaboration, etc.) and multidisciplinary learning modules.

The implementation of the core curriculum needs to be monitored.

- Our studies have shown that the support model is functioning relatively well on a structural level. However, in practice there is more variation in how the local school principle and inclusion are understood and implemented in the municipalities.

More training and research is still needed.

A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow and a long, shimmering reflection on the water's surface. The sky is a mix of soft yellow and pale blue. In the background, a dark silhouette of a forest lines the shore. The foreground shows the textured surface of the water, with some ripples and reflections.

**THANK YOU.  
KIITOS.**