



2020-21

## Legislative International Education Study Group

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### NCSL: FINLAND'S APPROACH TO DISTANCE LEARNING, September 2020

#### Timeline

Schools closed on March 18, and distance learning began immediately. Schools remained [open](#) for: students in grades 1-3 whose parents are essential workers; and students with special educational needs. In-person classes resumed (for students in grades 1-9 only) on May 14 for the last two weeks of the year, with social distancing plans in place dictated by local Municipalities (e.g., making use of other buildings, half-day classes for rotating groups of students, outdoor classes). The government [recommended](#) that upper secondary schools continue distance learning for the rest of the school year. During the two weeks of in-person classes, teachers gauged students' progress during distance learning and identified additional support students may need when they would return to school in the [fall](#). In [mid-August](#), all students returned to in-person classes with the new school year, but a temporary amendment to the Basic Education Act allows school leaders to shift to online learning if the pandemic situation worsens.

#### Guidance and resources provided to schools, teachers, and parents:

The National Agency for Education said that schools should transition to distance learning with the [goal](#) of “deviating from normal operations as little as possible,” but pointed to the websites of municipalities and schools for implementation details. Some large municipalities already had their own online learning approaches/resources, and smaller municipalities worked to develop them. The National Agency also [organized](#) an “advisory service” (help line e-mail address) for schools and educators to submit questions.

#### Resources provided to schools, teachers, and families:

The Ministry of Education and Culture and the National Agency for Education developed an Open Educational Resources (OER) [library](#) that was just implemented in 2020. Development was coordinated by the [Finnish IT Center for Science](#) (CSC), a nonprofit state enterprise.

The [Finnish National Broadcasting Company](#) (YLE) worked with teachers to organize existing [YLE resources](#)—such as television programming and teaching and learning [resources](#) based on news stories—to support distance learning. YLE programming and other resources for distance learning were made available [online](#) and on television.

Finland has a nationwide home-school communication [system](#) called Wilma (available online and as an app). Children [receive](#) a “Wilma ID” that their parents can use to sign up for Wilma when they register with their municipality for school. Each school decides which communication features it will make available in Wilma. In general, students can [use](#) Wilma to check their grades, view school announcements, and communicate with teachers. Upper secondary school students can register for courses. Teachers can record grades and attendance and communicate with students and families.

## **Impact on Assessments**

The Finnish National Certificate of Language Proficiency tests were cancelled from March 18 to May 23, 2020 and registration for exams resumed in August 2020 for fall testing dates, starting in October. The matriculation examinations, which are for university entry, were delayed by a week and condensed into a shorter testing window in March 2020. Any student who participated in this condensed week is allowed to retake the exam in fall 2020 at no extra cost. The number of testing days in fall 2020 exams will be doubled so that students can observe social distancing.