
RESEARCH AND POLICY

Thin line between facts and fiction in education research and policy

Global Development Network Conference – Lima, PERU – 18 March 2016

 @pasi_sahlberg

RESEARCH AND POLICY

“We now only rarely discover facts for evidence, instead, we download them.”

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Fact:

Something that has actual existence

Big Data:

Data of a very large size to the extent that its manipulation and management present significant logistical challenges

Research:

Investigation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts

50

**MYTHS & LIES
THAT THREATEN
AMERICA'S
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

The REAL CRISIS in EDUCATION

David C. Berliner
Gene V Glass
and Associates

REIGN

**GLOBAL
EDUCATIONAL
REFORM**

How Privatization and
Public Investment Influence
Education Outcomes

EDITED BY
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www.adamsonth.org

**A CHRONICLE
OF ECHOES**

Who's Who in the Implosion of
American Public Education

des K. Schneider

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Harnessing choice
greater quality a

James Croft, Gab

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**ADM
ONE**

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National
Alliance
for Public
Charter
Schools

**Separating
Fact & Fiction:**

WHAT YOU NEED TO
KNOW ABOUT
CHARTER SCHOOLS

1

The most important single factor in improving quality of education is teachers.

1

The most important single factor in improving quality of education is teachers.

fact

myth

1

The most important single factor in improving quality of education is teachers.

myth

2

Low-ability teachers perform as well as teachers of average ability if they have strong social capital in their school.

2

Low-ability teachers perform as well as teachers of average ability if they have strong social capital in their school.

fact

myth

2

Low-ability teachers perform as well as teachers of average ability if they have strong social capital in their school.

fact

3

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

3

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

myth

Four Policy Issues

Policy Issue #1: Competition by school choice

Fiction

“When schools compete over enrolment, quality of education improves.”

- *Most American politicians*

Big Data

“At the school level, schools that compete for student enrolment with other schools **tend to show better performance**, before accounting for schools’ socio-economic intake.”
– PISA 2012, vol IV, 54.

“School choice and competition **are not related to improved** performance”
– PISA 2012 vol IV, p. 133

Research

The Swedish experiment (using for-profit private providers) **has proved expensive and has not led to significant learning gains overall**. At the same time the Swedish reforms, albeit on a small scale, appear to have increased inequality, even in the context of this very egalitarian system.”
– Wiborg 2010, p. 19

Policy Issue #2: Test-based accountability

Fiction

“With sharper accountability ... we can create an education system which can compete with the best in the world.”

- *Michael Gove*

Big Data

“School autonomy has a positive relationship with student performance **when accountability measures are in place.**”

– PISA 2012, vol. IV, 29.

Research

“The research to date suggests that **the benefits of test-based incentive programs** over the past two decades **have been quite small.**”

– Hout & Elliott, 2011

Policy Issue #3: Parental involvement

Fiction

“Higher expectations from ‘tiger parents’ in the UK could boost school performance.”

-Michael Gove

Big Data

“Parents’ engagement with their 15-year-olds **is strongly associated with better performance** in PISA.”

– PISA in Focus #10, 2011.

Research

“**No clear connection** exists between parental involvement and improved student performance.”

– Robinson & Harris, 2014

Policy Issue #4: Teacher quality

Fiction

“The most important single factor in improving quality of education is teachers.”

-Michele Rhee, Joel Kline

Big Data

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

– PISA 2012, vol. IV, 96.

Research

“Around 9 % of variation in student achievement is due to teacher characteristics. About 60 % of variation is explainable by individual student characteristics, family characteristics, and such variables. **All school input combined (teacher quality, class variables, etc.) account for approximately 21 % of student outcomes.**”

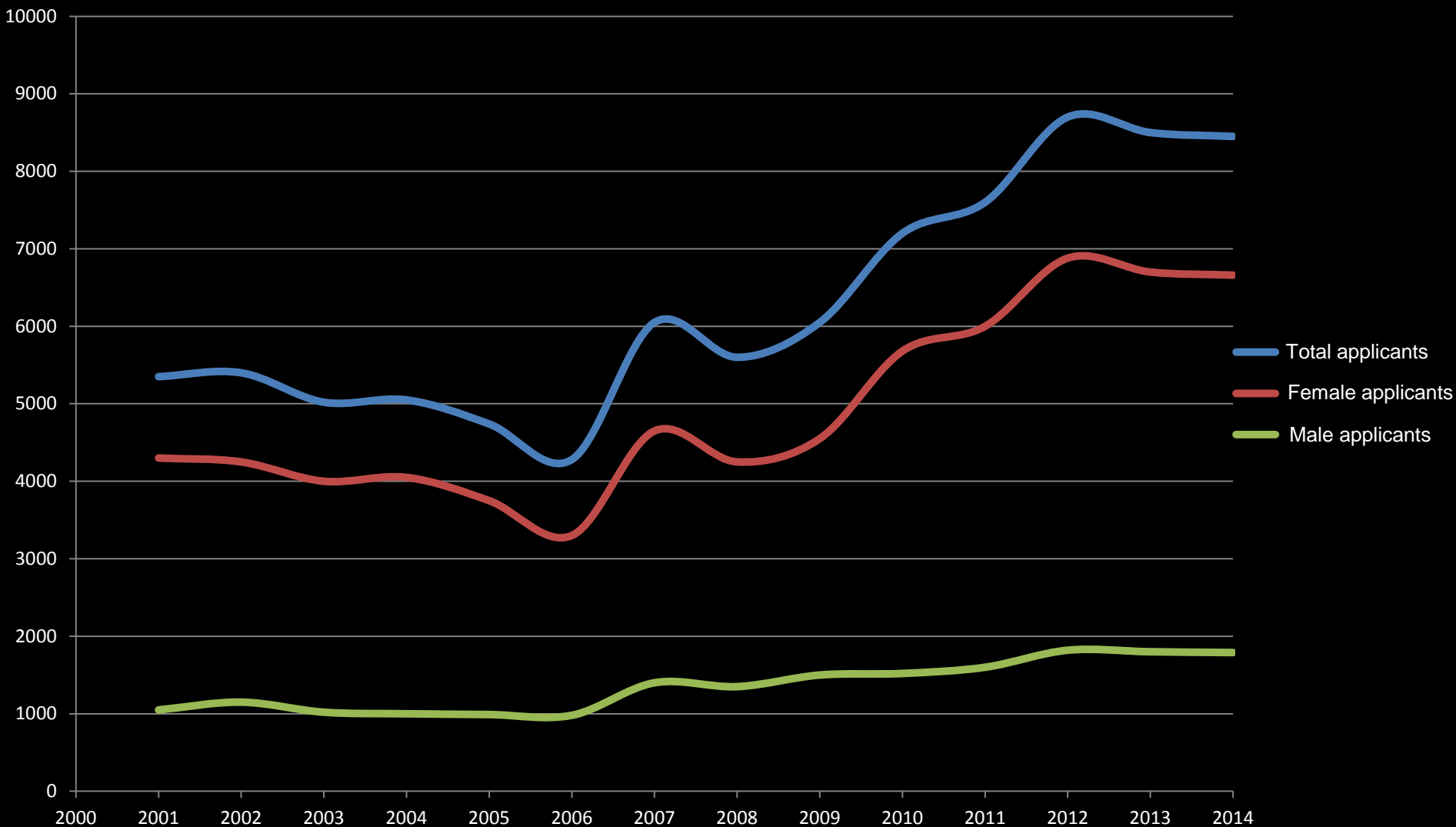
– Goldhaber et al., 2010

“Most studies find that teachers account for about 1% to 14% of the variability in test scores, and that the majority of opportunities for quality improvement are found in the system-level conditions.”

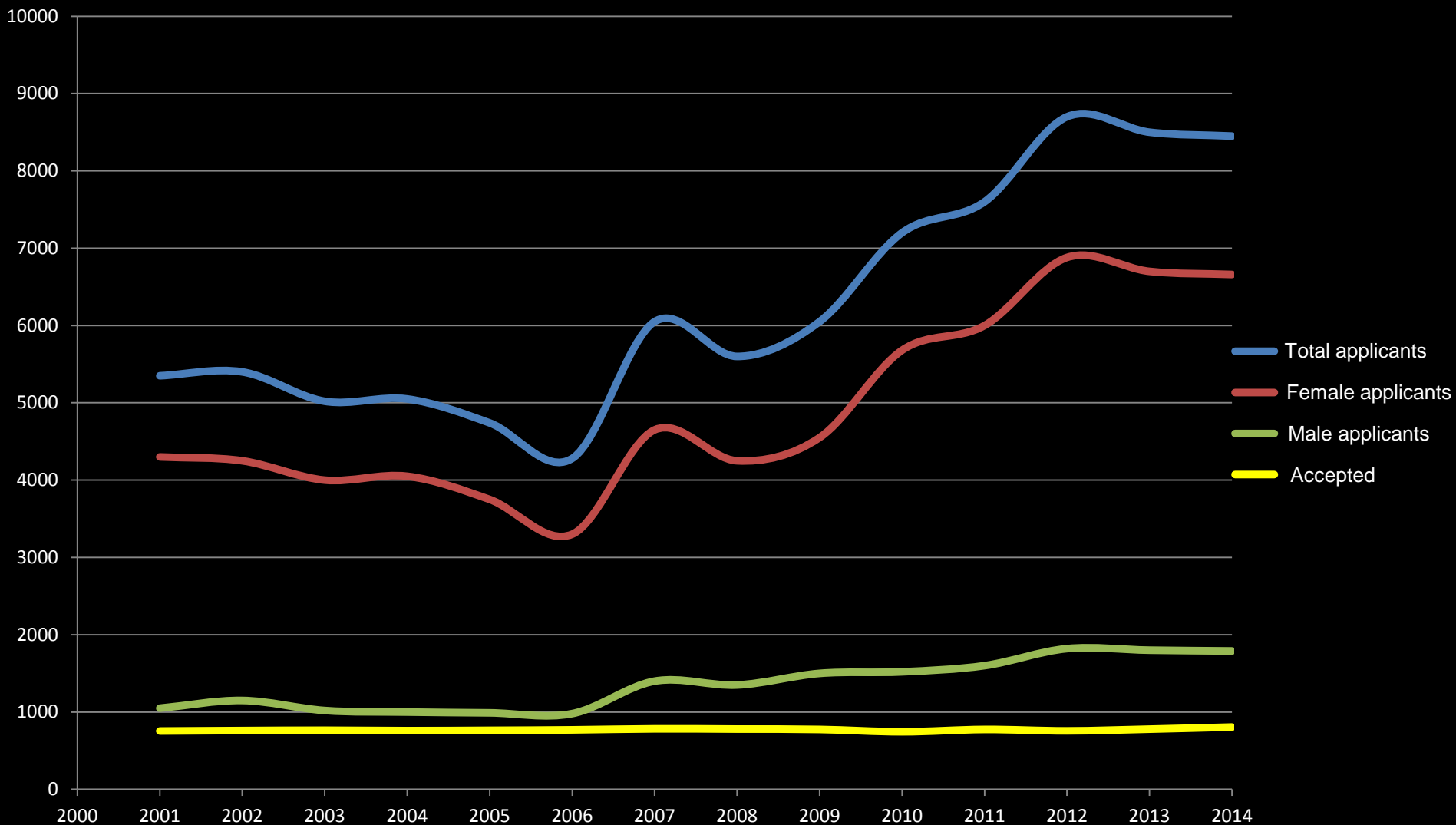
- American Statistical Association, 2014

An example from Finland

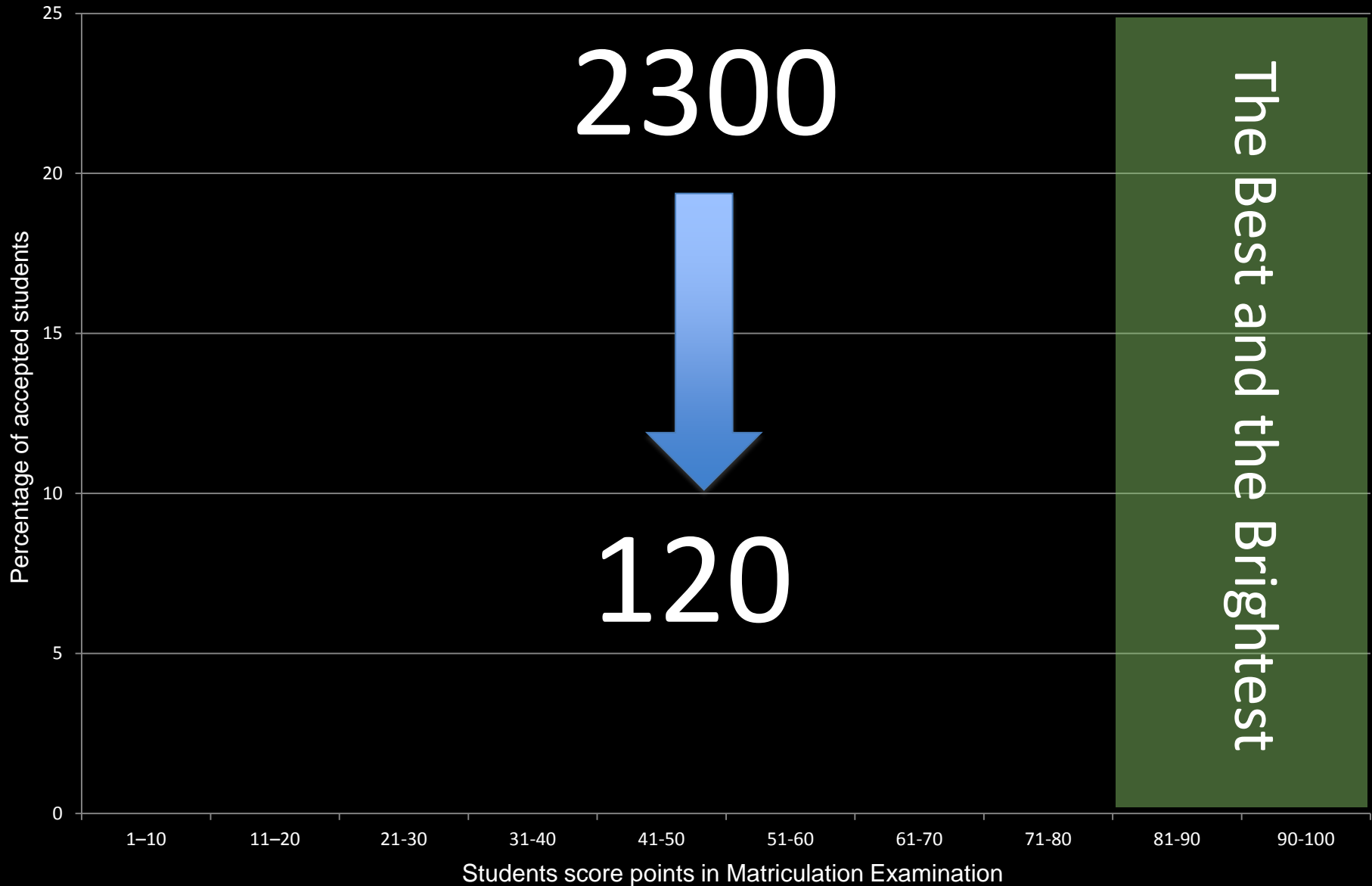
Applicants and accepted to Primary School Teacher Education Programs in Finland



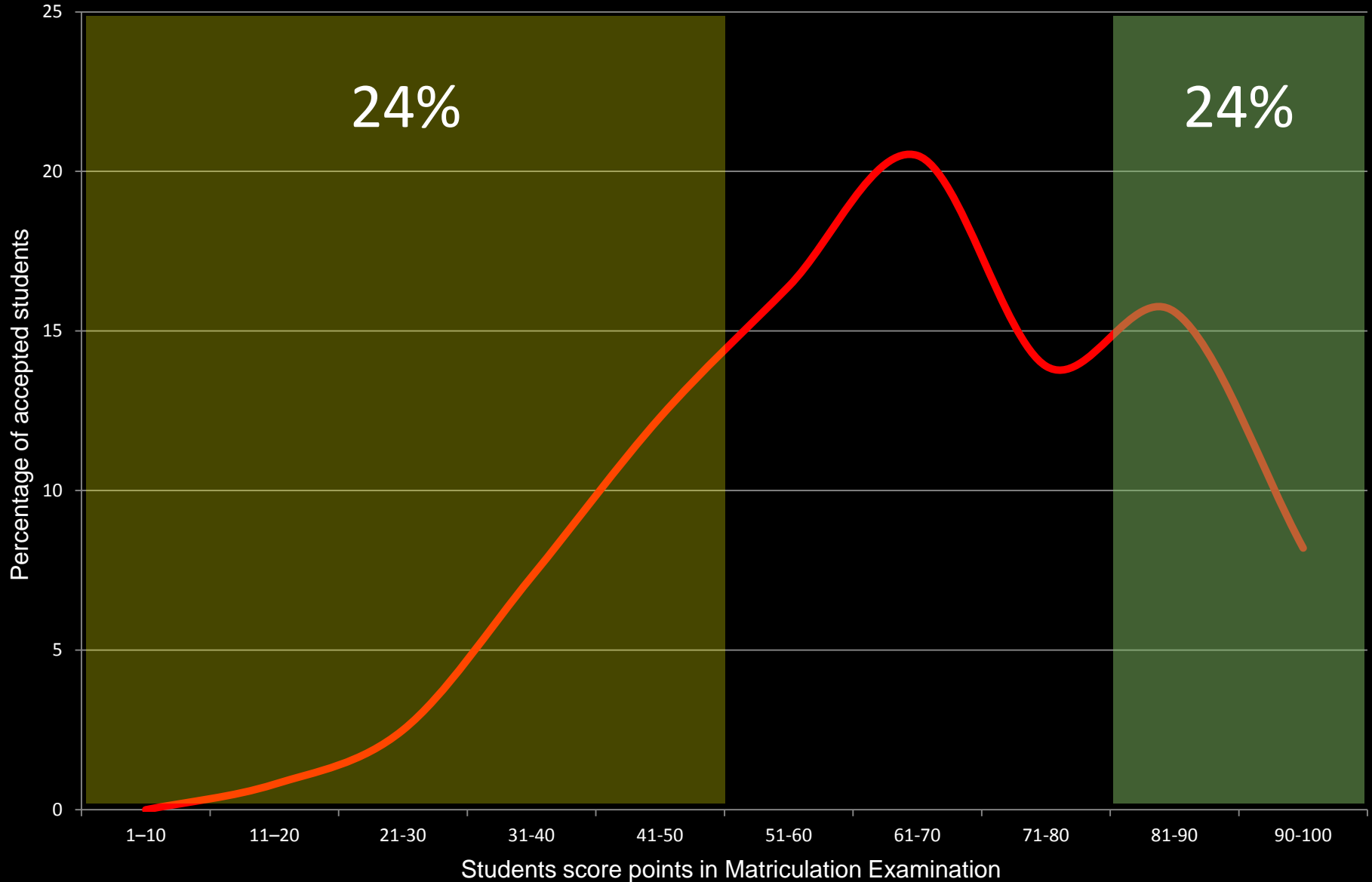
Applicants and accepted to Primary School Teacher Education Programs in Finland



Academic Profile of Accepted Primary School Teacher Education Students at the University of Helsinki 2014



Academic Profile of Accepted Primary School Teacher Education Students at the University of Helsinki 2014



Conclusion

People gravitate toward information that confirms what they believe, and they select sources that deliver it.

Conclusion

- 1 Better information faster
- 2 Big Data supplemented by Small Data
- 3 Evidence should be independent from its funders
- 4 Principals and teachers should be research literate
- 5 Research must include education scholars/experts

Thank you!