

Idaho teen earns worldwide recognition

Jennifer Swindell/IdahoED NEWS

An Idaho high school dropout who says he doesn't plan to go to college made Time's list of the most influential teens in the world.

Erik Finman, a computer programmer, is joined on the list with the Obama girls, actors, singers, athletes and entrepreneurs. Time analyzed social-media followings, cultural accolades and business and athletic accomplishments to create its [Top 25 list for 2014](#).



Erik Finman

Finman, a 15-year-old from North Idaho's Rathdrum, was recognized for founding [Botangle.com](#), a video and chat tutoring service for teens. When Finman was only 13, he invested a \$1,000 gift from his grandmother in [Bitcoin](#), a digital currency software that rocketed his money in value to \$100,000. He used that money to start his own business a year later.

"It is easier to start a business than get an A in math," said Finman, who dropped out of Coeur d'Alene High because he was not succeeding, earning Cs and Ds. "Their way of teaching didn't work for me. I didn't get good grades. I figured there are others out there like me."

Finman was extremely frustrated by the traditional educational environment and said one of his teachers predicted he would be working in the fast food industry.

Instead, Finman is an accomplished programmer living in California's Silicon Valley, home to many of the world's largest technology corporations, as well as thousands of small start up companies like his.

“I decided to take my education into my own hands,” Finman said. “I’ve learned so much writing applications for grants, sending and receiving emails from important people, writing one-pagers. I write about stuff I’m passionate about instead of writing about something I don’t really care about, which used to result in a D on my English grade.”

Finman said his parents, both engineers, have been supportive of him chasing his dreams and diving into things that he finds interesting. They did make a bet with their son — if he earns \$1 million before he turns 18, he doesn’t have to go to college. Otherwise, it’s back to school.

“I have a lot of ideas I’m working on and I’m getting experience and meeting a lot of people — I’ll make it happen,” said Finman, who is expanding his tutoring offerings to include internships and “un-conferences” where teens get together in person or video chats to learn and study from each other. “There’s not one person speaking all the time like at a typical conference. People circle up and chat about what they are interested in. It’s a much better way of learning.”

Finman this week returned from London where he filmed with [TED Talk](#), a nonprofit devoted to “ideas worth spreading” that films people as they explain their inspirations from “the power of hand washing” to “the hidden force in global economics.”

Finman’s next adventure is to apply for a grant through the [Thiel Fellowship](#), which gives \$100,000 each to 20 people under the age of 20 with innovative ideas. The site says: “Some ideas just can’t wait.”

“My advice to Idaho teens is to dropout but don’t get pregnant,” Finman said. “Follow your own path and chase what interests you. Use the internet and you own the world.”