

IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Why School Leadership Matters

School leadership has become a priority in education policy agendas across OECD and partner countries. It plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the environment in which they work. At the interface between classrooms, individual schools and the outside world, school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling.

As countries are seeking to adapt their education systems to the needs of contemporary society, the expectations for schools and school leaders have changed profoundly. The role of school leaders has been evolving in response to shifting expectations for schools and educational policies that stress decentralisation, autonomy and accountability, as well as new understandings of teaching and learning.

Once limited to the functions of bureaucratic administrator or head teacher, school leadership is now increasingly defined by a far larger and more demanding set of roles including financial and human resource management and leadership for learning. In many countries today, the men and women who run schools are overburdened, underpaid and near retirement. And there are few people lining up for their jobs.

Policy makers need to adapt school leadership policy to new environments by addressing the major challenges that have arisen and intensified over the past decades. As expectations of what school leaders should achieve have changed, the definition and distribution of tasks, as well as the levels of training, support and incentives need revision.

What leadership roles are most effective in improving student learning? How to allocate and distribute different leadership tasks? How to ensure current and future school leaders develop the right skills for effective leadership? How to revitalise the profession to make it attractive to high-quality candidates? These are questions facing governments around the world.

The OECD *Improving School Leadership* Activity

Based on a study of school leadership policy challenges across countries, the *Improving School Leadership* activity provides information and analysis to help policy makers develop and implement school leadership policies for improved teaching and learning. The activity was designed to:

- synthesise research on issues related to improving leadership in schools;
- identify innovative and successful policy initiatives and practices;
- facilitate exchanges of lessons and policy options among countries;
- identify policy options for governments to consider.

Parallel complementary approaches have been developed to achieve these objectives effectively. Participating countries have each provided a country background report following a common framework (analytical strand). Five case studies on *school leadership for systemic improvement* and *training and development of school leaders* complement the work by providing examples of innovative practice

(innovative case study strand). This approach permits the collection of information necessary to compare country developments while at the same time adopting a more innovative and forward looking approach to policy making.

The definition of school leaders guiding the overall OECD activity suggests that effective school leadership may not reside exclusively in formal positions but instead be distributed across a range of individuals in the school. Principals, deputy and assistant principals, middle managers, department heads, school board members and teachers can contribute as leaders to the goal of learning-centred schooling. The precise distribution of these leadership contributions can vary and can depend on factors such as governance and management structure, levels of autonomy and accountability, school size and complexity, and levels of student performance.

Participating countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Belgium (French), Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Korea, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom (England), United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland).

The activity has produced a range of outcomes: country background reports, innovative case study reports, participating country workshops, international conferences, assorted publications, a final comparative report and a dedicated website (www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership).

Upcoming Publications

The final comparative report, *Improving School Leadership: Policy and Practice*, will be published in 2008. It is based on an in-depth study of school leadership practices and policies in 22 countries. Offering a valuable cross-country perspective, it identifies four policy levers and a range of policy options to help governments improve school leadership now and build sustainable leadership for the future.

OECD's work on school leadership will include a companion volume entitled *Improving School Leadership: Case studies and Concepts on Systemic Action*. Systemic leadership is an innovative new approach to sharing leadership within schools and across school systems. This publication examines the emerging concept and its implications for education policy. Case studies from five countries illustrate how it works in practice and how countries are developing and training a new generation of school leaders:

- school leadership for systemic improvement: Belgium (Flanders), England and Finland;
- school leadership development strategies: Austria and Australia.

To complete the set of publications, *Improving School Leadership: Tool Kit for Policy Makers and Practitioners* will be available to help stakeholders think through reform processes in their national and school contexts.

Effective school leadership is viewed as key to education reform worldwide. These books will be of interest to policy makers, school administrators, principals, teachers and parents.

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