Why Strategic Education Governance (SEG)?

Education systems are complex. While some OECD countries have a long tradition of providing local authorities and school leaders with sizeable autonomy in how they run their schools, others have only relatively recently made moves to decentralise control to respond more directly to citizens’ needs. This means that policy making takes place at different levels of the system.

At the same time, those in charge of the system are joined by parents and other stakeholders in decision-making, and relationships between stakeholders and decision-makers are increasingly dynamic and open to negotiation. The various actors, such as policy makers, parents, and teachers, can have varying perspectives on the system’s problems and how to solve them.

Interpretations of the reality differ, and so do expectations and preferred solutions. Information is now more widely gathered than ever before, and while the growing availability of information allows new insights and approaches to shape education, it also prompts new demands.

Despite this complexity of today’s education systems, it is still ministries that remain responsible for ensuring high-quality and equitable education. The Strategic Education Governance (SEG) project seeks to support countries in this complex environment, helping authorities juggling the dynamism and complexity of today’s education systems at the same time as steering a clear course towards established goals.
From complexity theory to a how-to of improvement

Looking at education systems through the lens of complexity theory offers many lessons for governance. The most fundamental aspect is this: a complex system is characterised by the relationships among its constituent parts, in turn leading to dynamics that cannot be anticipated from looking at the parts in isolation. Thinking in terms of complexity theory has informed previous work on education governance, and based on both conceptual and empirical studies, this perspective has changed how countries see governance of their education systems.

The Strategic Education Governance (SEG) project follows on from this work. Backed up by the substantial body of research carried out over five years, it takes on the task of making the findings directly usable for countries, while at the same time continuing to expand our knowledge base on how to effectively govern complex education systems.

While complicated problems often require vast expertise – for example sending a rocket to the moon –, once solved, it is reasonable to expect the same approach will lead to success again. In contrast, for complex challenges there is no one-size-fits-all approach to success: Just as applying the same parenting approach to different children may produce very different results, the unpredictability of a complex environment requires dynamic and adaptive strategies.
What the Strategic Education Governance project does

Effective governance means managing the dynamism and complexity of today’s education systems while steering a clear course towards common goals. The Strategic Education Governance (SEG) project supports countries and education systems in addressing tensions and challenges, helping them develop capacity for strategic reform and problem-solving, and balancing system-wide objectives with context-sensitive approaches. It does so by:

- developing a policy toolkit based on a set of indicators for countries to support strategic education governance;
- designing and delivering SEG Learning Seminars to support countries with current governance challenges and reforms; and
- continuing research on innovative approaches to governance challenges.
The SEG Organisational Framework

Integral to the Strategic Education Governance (SEG) project is its Organisational Framework. This is organised into six domains, each broken down into key elements that are required for fostering strategic education governance. The framework incorporates a range of considerations: empirical findings in previous work on education governance, country priorities in traditional areas of governance, and recent research and new empirical evidence on effective governance processes emerging from the SEG work.

The Organisational Framework combines the analytical lens of the complexity paradigm with practical considerations in order to maximise its ability to guide improvement efforts. It is designed to stimulate reflection and guide strategic decisions when facing the intricacies of what complexity entails for education policy, governance and reform.
Accountability
- Enabling local discretion while limiting fragmentation
- Promoting a culture of learning and improvement

Capacity
- Ensuring capacity for policy-making and implementation
- Stimulating horizontal capacity building

Whole-of-system perspective
- Overcoming system inertia
- Developing synergies within the system and moderating tensions

Knowledge governance
- Collecting quality and rich data for research and decision-making
- Facilitating access to data and knowledge
- Promoting a culture of using rich data and knowledge

Strategic thinking
- Crafting, sharing and consolidating a system vision
- Adapting to changing contexts and new knowledge
- Balancing urgencies/short-term priorities with the long-term system vision

Stakeholder involvement
- Integrating stakeholder knowledge and perspectives
- Fostering support, shared responsibility, ownership and trust
The SEG policy toolkit

SEG is developing a policy toolkit involving a set of governance indicators to help countries promote effective governance processes in complex systems.

The policy toolkit aims to complement existing education indicators; most currently available indicators capture education contexts, inputs, outputs and outcomes, for example the OECD indicators published in Education at a Glance (EAG) or the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) publication series.

The SEG indicators, adding to these existing indicators, can be thought of as the ‘missing middle’ in education policy because they seek to measure how policy making and reform are carried out, rather than which policies are effective to produce certain outputs and improve education outcomes.

The SEG policy toolkit is designed to directly guide efforts to improve governance processes, providing policy makers with the means to focus attention on those processes that enable and support strategic education governance in a complex world.
SEG indicators seek to…

Assess the presence of elements that allow governance to cope with the complexity of modern education systems and pursue strategic goals for the education system.

Be actionable. Actionable indicators drill down to individual components, provide the tools to identify which components work well and which ones do not, and offer clear pathways towards improvement.

Provide a framework to help countries identify and improve the processes to effectively develop policies and improve policy implementation, both in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

In contrast, SEG does not seek to prescribe certain policies or strategic objectives.

In contrast, SEG does not aspire to measure the performance of entire governance systems via the relative comparison of different systems on composite governance indicators.

In contrast, SEG does not aim to assess the implementation of specific policies or to quantify the effect of governance on education outcomes.
SEG Learning Seminars

SEG Learning Seminars apply OECD insights on strategic education governance to specific policy challenges. Each seminar brings together a small group of countries/systems, contrasting and comparing their varying governance approaches and the challenges they each face. The seminars examine the design and consequences of implementation strategies, producing both new knowledge and making tacit knowledge explicit, and helping participants draw lessons for governance practice.

Key features of the SEG Learning Seminars:

- Seminars focus on real-life policy experiences with the help of stakeholders involved
- The host country or system decides the theme in consultation with the OECD
- Each seminar has an explicit phase of reflection and translation into different contexts
- A background paper to serve as a basis for each seminar is prepared by the OECD in close cooperation with the host country
- A short final report on the main findings is prepared by the OECD
The SEG Learning Seminars work with countries on questions as diverse as…

Which mixes of government roles and governance instruments can address the tension between the political demand for the central level to steer school policies and practices in pursuit of the public interest, while responsibilities rest mainly with school boards?

How can school accountability arrangements increase clarity about performance and gather information about policy effectiveness, while at the same time fostering learning and trust and without weighing schools down?

What are the favourable conditions, success factors and risks for introducing a new approach to school supervision and external evaluation, particularly when aiming to increase school autonomy?
The OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) contributes to supporting participating OECD Members and Partners in their efforts to achieve high quality lifelong learning for all, which contributes to personal development, sustainable economic growth and social cohesion.

CERI work adds unique value to countries grappling with the challenges of achieving better education outcomes by taking a forward-looking approach and helping them move towards the frontier(s) of education while capitalising on the richness of international comparisons and experience that the OECD offers.

CERI’s objectives are to:

- Provide and promote international comparative research, innovation and key indicators
- Explore forward-looking and innovative approaches to education and learning
- Facilitate bridges between educational research, innovation and policy development

CERI is part of the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills.
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Further information about the SEG project can be found at
www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/strategic-education-governance.htm

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