

## **OECD SAYS COUNTRIES SHOULD RETHINK HUMAN RESOURCE POLICIES FOR SCHOOLS**

A new OECD report highlights that the staff working in schools are more than the sum of their parts. While teachers are key in improving learning opportunities for students, they can do so more effectively when collaborating with other staff.

The report (<http://www.oecd.org/publications/working-and-learning-together-b7aaf050-en.htm>), which was co-funded by the European Commission, provides new insights on how the mix of staff in schools varies across countries and reflects different priorities such as inclusion policies or more holistic learning goals. 19 country profiles offer comparative information on the types of staff working in schools across participating countries.

The report explores how human resource policies can recognise, preserve and strengthen the positive impact that school staff have on students. The analysis moves beyond a perspective of improving education one teacher at a time to focus on supportive working environments for all school staff. While attracting talented individuals is important, so are opportunities for professional growth and collaboration that fit particular school contexts.

The report highlights that human resource questions are critical not only from an educational perspective but also when thinking about resource effectiveness. Spending on staff constitutes the largest expenditure in any OECD education budget. But countries apportion vastly different levels of resources to staff salaries, reflecting different choices about employment conditions, staff mix, professional learning and instruction.

The report highlights related resource trade-offs to help countries make informed choices about investments in career pathways, working conditions and professional learning systems. It proposes six policy approaches to support effective working environments in schools. Among these, it recommends to:

### **Design career structures with opportunities for professional growth**

Less than half of countries participating in the study offer multi-stage career structures for teachers and few offer clear career pathways and development opportunities for school leadership.

The report illustrates how well-defined career structures allow teachers to mobilise their growing expertise and interests while providing opportunities for professional growth. In particular, middle leadership positions can offer attractive career options for teachers, support distributed leadership in schools and create a pipeline for future school principals. Beyond individual schools, system leadership and coordination roles can harness the skills of experienced leaders to spread good practice across schools.

### **Ensure an effective and equitable distribution of staff between and within schools**

Inequities in the distribution of staff across schools in different socio-economic circumstances are problematic in many countries. In more than a third of school systems participating in PISA, teachers in the most disadvantaged schools are less qualified or experienced than those in the most advantaged schools.

The report highlights that sharing responsibilities between schools and the education administration holds promise to support more effective and equitable staff distributions. In addition, countries need to ensure that all schools, and especially those in challenging circumstances, provide attractive and supportive working conditions.

Schools may require different types of staff to fit their circumstances. Needs-assessment studies can help determine the right staff mix and inform future resource allocations, for example whether to invest in training for existing staff or hire additional staff to address identified needs, or both.

### **Adopt a broad vision of professional learning for teaching and school leadership**

In many OECD countries, initial teacher preparation is unduly focussed on disciplinary knowledge at the expense of opportunities to practice pedagogical skill. The report shows that expectations for school-based practice in initial teacher education vary widely across countries. School leaders and other school staff such as school social workers would also benefit from high-quality practical applications in their training.

Models of clinical practice in education can bring research-based preparation into dialogue with the professional understanding of experienced school staff. For school leaders, clear and consistent expectations for initial preparation, both in theory and in practice, are critical to improve their development.

Professional learning does not end after the initial years in a new position. Regular coaching, mentoring and collaboration focussed on actual school or classroom situations have proved effective in promoting reflection and practice improvement among teachers. Continuing learning opportunities should be connected to school and system goals.