

OECD ACTIVITY IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: DESCRIPTION OF THE INNOVATIVE CASE STUDY STRAND

This document provides a description of the innovative case study strand of the OECD activity on Improving School Leadership and aims to provide a clear understanding of its purpose, scope, methodology and calendar. This innovative case study strand complements an analytical strand based on country background reports which provide an analysis of their policies and approaches to school leadership.

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

School leaders in OECD countries are facing challenges and pressures with the rising expectations for schools and schooling in a century characterized by rapid and constant technological innovation, massive migration and mobility, and increasing economic globalization. As countries struggle to transform their educational systems to prepare all young people with the knowledge and skills needed to function in a rapidly changing world, the roles and expectations for school leaders have changed radically. They are no longer expected to be merely good managers but leaders of schools as learning organizations. Effective school leadership is increasingly viewed as key to large-scale education reform and to improved educational outcomes.

The overall purpose of the activity is to provide policy-makers with information and analysis to assist them in formulating and implementing school leadership policies leading to improved teaching and learning. The activity has the following objectives: (i) to synthesise research on issues related to improving leadership in schools; (ii) to identify innovative and successful policy initiatives and practices; (iii) to facilitate exchanges of lessons and policy options among countries; and (iv) to identify policy options for governments to consider.

More specifically the activity aims to support policy development by providing in-depth analyses of different approaches to school leadership, which can be summarised in the following key questions:

What are the roles and responsibilities of school leaders under different governance structures?
What seem to be promising policies and conditions for making school leaders most effective in improving school outcomes?

How can effective school leadership be best developed and supported? What policies and practices would be most conducive to these ends?

To reply to these questions more effectively, the activity has two complementary strands: an analytical strand and 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. Workshops and international conferences will be the main venues to discuss the key issues.

Analytical strand: All participating countries are involved in the analytical strand, providing a country background report within a common framework.

Innovative case study strand: Additionally, a small number of case studies of innovative practices in school leadership as well as in the development of school leaders will complement the work by providing examples of innovative practice.

Participating countries

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

INNOVATIVE CASE STUDY STRAND

Purpose

The purpose of the case study strand is to complement the analytical strand of the activity with examples of innovative practices in school leadership and their policy implications. Approximately 3-5 carefully selected studies each will explore separately the two key questions framing the overall initiative spelled out above - i.e., a) new models of school organization and management that distribute leadership roles in innovative ways; and b) promising programmes and practices for the preparation and development of school leaders. For both questions, the case studies are intended to provide policy makers with detailed descriptions and analysis of innovations and their implementation, and to identify both the policy conditions in which the innovations are being conducted and any further implications for policy suggested by the individual and collective cases. The case studies will be included in a series of publications and in the final comparative report of the activity.

The case study approach is itself an innovation in the OECD Education and Training Policy Division approach to its work. The more customary practice of conducting thematic reviews and preparing individual country notes seemed less appropriate in the current initiative because the teacher policy thematic review which preceded this activity already generated information in the area¹, and it was felt that to understand better the challenges of leadership, a different approach would be needed. Instead, the innovative case studies provide in-depth information across countries of innovations under both study questions that can inform debate, guide innovative practice, provide reference and help frame school leadership policies in OECD countries.

While resources are not sufficient to permit this strand to support case studies covering the full range of approaches proposed under each set of questions below, case studies will be selected according to a specified set of criteria and recommendations of participating countries, research literature, and expert consultants. The two sets of case studies will respond to the following questions:

¹OECD (2005) Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers.

Question A: Models of school organization and management that distribute leadership roles in innovative ways

As is suggested by the definition of school leaders guiding the overall activity, effective school leadership may reside not exclusively in formal offices or positions but instead be distributed across a range of individuals in the school. Principals, managers, academic leaders, department chairs, and teachers can contribute as leaders to the goal of learning-centred schooling. The precise distribution of these leadership contributions can vary. Such factors as governance and management structure, amount of autonomy afforded at the school level, accountability prescriptions, school size and complexity, and levels of student performance can shape the kinds and patterns of school leadership. Thus principals can act not only as managers but also as leaders of the school as a learning organization. Together with teachers, they interact to constitute a productive, cohesive learning community.

This perspective suggests several specific areas to focus on:

“System improvement,” where the school leaders take responsibility for contributing to the success of other schools as well as to their own school; or where regional or local level teams engage leaders in re-culturing and working collaboratively to support one another in achieving common goals of student learning.

Partnerships or collaborations of schools with other organizations in which the organization and management arrangements distribute leadership across a combination of individuals, organizations and groups.

School-level learning communities in which a combination of managerial and teacher leadership build “professional communities” and “collective efficacy” through shared commitment to challenging learning goals, collective responsibility for student performance, continuous improvement geared around collaborative data-based decision-making, and staff, student, and community engagement.

Question B: Promising practices for the preparation and development of school leaders

An analysis of different approaches to training and development of effective school leaders can help policy makers better formulate and implement school leadership policies. The range of knowledge and skills that school leaders need today in order to be effective is daunting. Effective leaders need, at a minimum, to know something about curricula, pedagogy and student and adult learning. They need skills in change management, group dynamics, interpersonal relations and communications. Depending on their governance context, they may well need skills in planning, budgeting, human resource management, marketing and fund raising.

However, the picture concerning the availability and quality of training and professional development of school leaders across the OECD countries is mixed. While there is evidence that many countries now provide school principals and senior staff with significantly more training, assistance and guidance than they received in the past (e.g., England’s Headteacher Induction Programme [Headship Early Provision from September 2006], the Australian National Professional Qualification for Headship, the Swedish four-step approach to principal training), opportunities for school leaders in this area leave much room for improvement. For example, a research study surveying new principals in Europe² found that 65% had received no formal or structured preparation for the job.

² Bolam, R., Dunning, G. and Karstanje, P. (Eds) (2000), *New Heads in the New Europe*, Waxmann, Munster.

The innovative case studies under this question will identify innovative practices to develop and support high quality school leaders. Among the range of innovative practices in this area the focus can be on the following:

- National or regional academies for preparation and continued professional development where programs are aligned with the desired vision of schooling and student outcomes and promote effective leadership consistent with that vision;
- Alternative mechanisms to recruitment and preparation of school leaders conducted through non-traditional organizations other than the universities and schools;
- Collaborations authorized by regional authorities in which individual partners (e.g., university-school district partnerships, intermediate unit collaborations) jointly define their needs, partner in the design of an academic programme aligned with those needs, and offer certified programmes to selected candidates;
- School or local level professional development specifically designed to promote the competencies required for academic leadership.

Selection of innovative case studies

The OECD Secretariat will identify potential candidate sites for case study by consulting with countries and using a variety of sources: information provided by countries; research; input from experts and stakeholders in the field; and knowledge developed in the international workshops organised on relevant issues. Although the exact number of case studies to be carried out will depend on the availability of funding as well as the quality of the candidate sites, we estimate that there will be six to eight such studies.

The selection of case studies will be made according to a set of specific criteria (Box 1). The criteria have been developed to reflect the variables of chief interest in this initiative. The final selection will be made by OECD in collaboration with the funding organizations.

BOX 1: CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF INNOVATIVE CASE STUDIES

A set of core criteria common to both questions includes:

- The final set reflects the diversity of education governance systems, financing arrangements, and political cultures of the countries represented in the activity;
 - The full range of relevant stakeholders is involved;
 - The practice has been in operation for a period of time sufficient to establish its operational viability;
 - The practice focuses on educational results and reflects a clear theory of action grounded in the current literature with promise of achieving those results;
 - The practice can demonstrate initial results that suggest that it is on track to achieve its intended outcomes;
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- Full access to the site and to relevant data is afforded.
- More particularly, for each of the two main foci for the studies, the exemplary cases should meet the criteria below.

Question A: Models of school organization and management that distribute leadership roles in innovative ways. The activities identified for case studies should:

- Demonstrate models of school organization and management where leadership roles and responsibilities are distributed in new ways;
- Take a systemic orientation that situates the leaders' behaviours and effects on student outcomes in the whole of the school or larger system or explores the interactions of the school with larger elements of the education or community systems.

Question B: Promising programmes and practices for the preparation and development of school leaders. The activities selected for case studies should:

- Be programmes or initiatives to prepare and develop school leaders that are based on innovative approaches about the roles and responsibilities of leaders, the purposes of schooling, and the operation of core school technologies to achieve intended outcomes;
- Be designed to produce leaders who work to build student-centred schools with capacity for high performance and continuous learning and improvement toward that end;
- Take a system-wide perspective; the innovative programmes should align with the larger goals and processes of the system concerning school improvement, student performance, and enhanced efficiency and effectiveness.

Methodology

Each case study will: (1) document details regarding the structure, content, processes, and outcomes of the innovative practice examined; (2) analyse the content in terms of the key organizing constructs (e.g., overarching governance and management structures; and (3) identify the policy conditions that are and/or should be in place to support the innovation at a systemic level.

Data will include documentary descriptions of the practice and observations of the practice operation; findings from evaluations; reports of programme participants, providers, policymakers, and system-level individuals with knowledge of the participants' experiences and behaviour; policy documents; and additional reviews of the literature.

Methods will include content review of documents, analysis of evaluation data, individual and group interviews; focus groups; and brief questionnaires.

A team of up to three experts will be responsible for planning and conducting each case study. (There will be some overlap in team membership within each of the two case study areas to ensure a degree of uniformity and consistency across studies.)

The OECD Secretariat and the funding organization will select the study team collaboratively. Each team will in general include two external experts/rapporteurs and a member of the OECD Secretariat. Experts will be chosen for their expertise in leadership and education content and in qualitative research as well as for their capacity to function effectively as members of a research and visitation team and to produce high quality work within established time frames.

The individual expert teams will develop a proposed research plan with study design and methodology based on common guidelines previously developed by OECD. The plan will identify the case for study and the site country; describe data to be collected, sources, and methods; identify the roles of each member of the team; and propose an analysis plan.

Each team will undertake case study visits of three to four days in length.

After the case study visit the study team will prepare a short case study report. Sharing the findings of these case studies at an international level can become a catalyst for educational reform agendas across all the OECD countries.

For each research question, the case studies will be complemented with an international conference hosted in one of the case study site countries. A report will report on the case studies and the results of the conference discussions. The report will describe the individual case programmes, summarize the major findings across sites, identify implications for state and national policy, and make recommendations for further research and development.

Outputs

The outputs of both sets of case studies will be individual reports of the case studies and a report that covers all the cases and the international conference for each question. These products are intended to advance knowledge about school leadership practice, development, and policy by enriching the literature on innovative models of distributed leadership and of principal preparation and development. More specifically, the reports will:

- explore innovative conceptualizations of the role of school leaders and the nature of skilled leadership practice in schools,

- describe key features and processes of the innovation in a manner that will inform practice elsewhere;

- analyze the content of the innovation in terms of key dimensions of exemplary practice such that readers will be helped to consider the application of (all or elements of) the innovation in the particular conditions of their own sites;

- identify and draw further implications for policy conditions needed to support such innovations; and

- point to new research and development needed to promote the adaptation and broad diffusion of such innovative practices and policies.

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