Improving School Leadership
Pointers for policy development

WHY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP MATTERS

➢ School leaders play a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment. Effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling.

➢ Many countries have given schools more autonomy while holding them more accountable for results. Schools are under pressure to improve overall student performance while serving more diverse student populations and to use more evidence-based teaching practices. School leadership increasingly defines roles that include financial and human resource management and leadership for learning.

➢ In many countries, principals have heavy workloads, many are reaching retirement and it is getting harder to replace them. Potential candidates often hesitate to apply, because of overburdened roles, insufficient preparation and training, limited career prospects and inadequate support and rewards.

➢ Policy makers need to enhance the quality of school leadership and make it sustainable.

(RE)DEFINE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

➢ Provide higher degrees of autonomy with appropriate support

➢ Redefine school leadership responsibilities to focus on key areas for improved student learning:
  – Supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality
  – Goal-setting, assessment and accountability
  – Strategic financial and human resource management
  – Collaborating with other schools

➢ Develop school leadership frameworks for improved policy and practice that can be a basis for consistent recruitment, training and appraisal of school leaders.

DISTRIBUTE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

➢ Encourage distribution of leadership across different people and organisational structures to help carry out the increased responsibilities schools face and improve school effectiveness.

➢ Support distribution of leadership through:
  – team approaches in national leadership frameworks,
  – incentive mechanisms to reward participation and performance in these teams
  – leadership training and development for mid-level management and potential future school leaders
  – accountability mechanisms modified to match distributed leadership structures

➢ Support school boards in their tasks by:
  – clarifying roles and responsibilities of school boards
  – ensuring consistency between their objectives and the skills and experience of board members
  – providing guidelines for improved recruitment and selection processes
  – developing support structures to ensure active participation in school boards, including opportunities for skills development

DEVELOP SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

➢ Treat leadership development as a continuum requiring a combination of formal and informal processes throughout all stages and contexts of leadership practice, to coherently support school leaders' careers.

➢ Encourage initial leadership training (voluntary or mandatory), define national programmes, collaborate across levels of government, develop incentives for participation and find the right candidates.

➢ Organise induction programmes to prepare and shape initial school leadership practices and provide vital networks for principals to share concerns and explore challenges.

➢ Ensure in-service training, taking account of prior learning opportunities for school leadership, so that principals and leadership teams can update their skills and keep up with new developments.

➢ Ensure consistency of provision by different institutions and providers who are catering to school leadership training needs, with clear standards and a focus on quality.

➢ Ensure that the variety of training programmes reflect content, design and methods of effective programmes, including curricular coherence, experience in real contexts, cohort grouping, mentoring, coaching, peer learning and structures for collaborative activity between the programme and schools.

MAKE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AN ATTRACTIVE PROFESSION

➢ Professionalise recruitment processes at both school and system level to ensure recruitment procedures, tools and criteria are effective, transparent and consistent in assessing candidates.

➢ Proactively identify and develop potential leaders and broaden eligibility criteria to attract younger dynamic candidates with different backgrounds.

➢ Improve salaries to make school leadership more competitive and attract high quality candidates. Separate salary scales for teachers and principals can attract more candidates and they should reflect leadership structures and school-level factors to attract high performing leaders to all schools.

➢ Acknowledge the role of professional organisations of school leaders in providing a forum for dialogue, knowledge sharing and dissemination of best practices among professionals. Engage them in the development and implementation of workforce reforms.

➢ Provide options and support for career development to:
  − help avoid principal burnout
  − make school leadership a more attractive career option
  − make the profession more flexible and mobile (allowing school leaders to move between schools as well as between leadership and teaching and other professions)

FURTHER READING

These general pointers for policy development are drawn from the Thematic Review of School Leadership, which examined policies and practices for school leadership in 22 countries. The findings of this review are presented in *Improving School Leadership Vol. 1 Policy and Practice,* published in June 2008. Background reports prepared by 21 countries, Case Studies on System Leadership, the Improving School Leadership toolkit and other documents of the review are also available on the OECD website www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership.