

School boards – school councils

Pointers for policy development

WHY SCHOOL BOARDS MATTER

- Effective school boards (also known as school councils or boards of governors) can contribute greatly to the success of their schools. By contributing to a well-run school, the board can improve the environment of learning and teaching and lead to better student outcomes.
- The school board's most important decision may be selecting the school principal or director, an appointment which is crucial to effective pedagogical leadership of the school.
- School boards also strengthen effective governance, promote democratic participation and establish relationships between schools and the community.

FACTORS AFFECTING SCHOOL BOARD SUCCESS

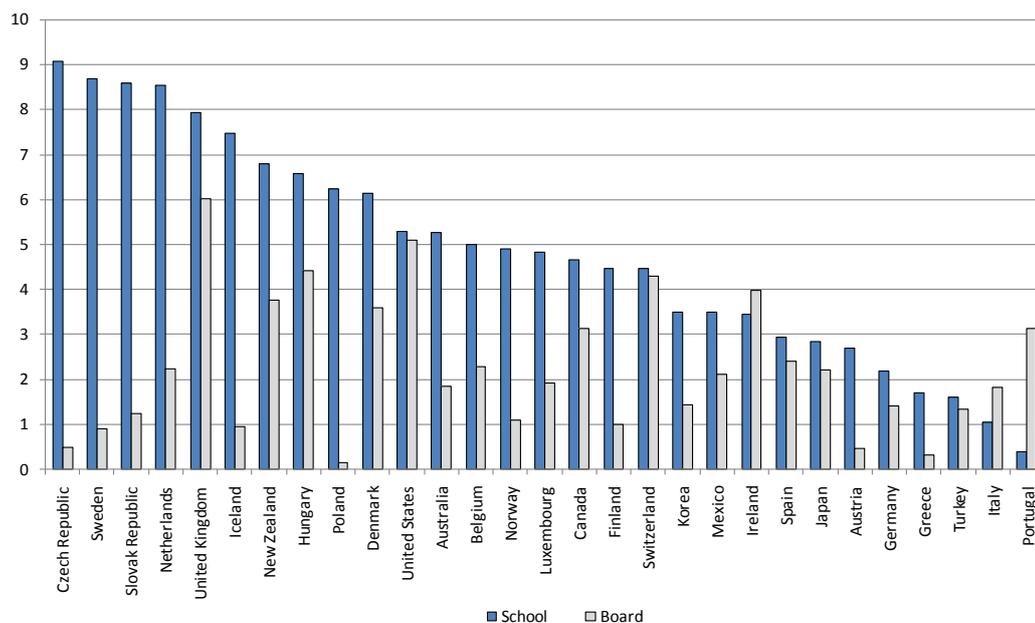
- School boards will only be effective if they:
 - are well prepared and have a clear definition of roles and responsibilities
 - receive appropriate support to develop their tasks
 - are an integral part of school governance
- School boards are most effective when they focus on:
 - student achievement and policy
 - effective management
 - development of conditions and structures that allow the principal to manage
 - agreement on processes to evaluate the principal and evaluation and training in the school
 - trust and collaborative relationships with principal and between board members
 - communication with outside groups and government
 - effective performance in policy making and financial management
- School boards sometimes do not work well in practice. Identified reasons include:
 - Not enough candidates for board positions
 - Lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities of boards
 - Too many responsibilities for volunteer positions
 - Tensions between boards and principals when demarcation of roles is not clear
 - Limited participation and engagement of board members
 - Lack of skills
- Recruitment and selection processes for board members need to encourage high quality and engaged candidates with suitable skills who will also reflect the diversity of the community.
- Support structures can boost active participation and provide training opportunities for board members to develop skills in school governance, including school evaluation and improvement.
- Countries may need to develop fall-back mechanisms to intervene where school boards are failing or look at other ways to draw governance expertise into schools if relying on volunteers is not effective in dealing with all the responsibilities placed on school boards.

COUNTRY PRACTICES

- School boards exist in most OECD countries. Boards generally have parents, teachers, students, community representatives and possibly students, local government representatives and sometimes, the school principal.

- In many countries there is general satisfaction that school boards bring communities and schools closer together, help principals take decisions and are active for school improvement.
- Decentralisation and school autonomy have given important powers to school boards, but in some countries, boards have not received the support needed to do the work, which is often voluntary.
- In some countries, boards have a high degree of responsibility over schools and school resources: selecting the principal is a key role. In others, little responsibility is devolved to either school boards or to the school itself.

School board participation in school resource decisions



Note: This index shows the degree of responsibility for i) selecting teachers, ii) dismissing teachers, iii) establishing teachers' starting salaries, iv) determining teachers' salary increases, v) formulating school budgets, vi) allocating budgets within the school. The closer the index is to 10, the greater the responsibility of the school or school board.

Source: OECD (2004), *Learning for Tomorrow's World: First Results from PISA 2003*, OECD, Paris

FURTHER INFORMATION

These pointers for policy development have been drawn from the OECD Review of School Leadership. The Review supports policy development by providing in-depth analyses of different approaches to school leadership across 22 countries. The review explored:

- roles and responsibilities of school leaders under different governance structures
- policies and conditions for making school leaders most effective in improving school outcomes
- how effective school leadership can be best developed and supported
- policies and practices most conducive to improving school leadership
- case studies of innovative practices in school leadership and development of school leaders

The Review's findings were published in *Improving School Leadership. Volume 1: Policy and Practice* and *Volume 2: Case Studies on System Leadership* in August 2008.

Background reports prepared by 21 countries and other information about the review are available on the OECD website www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership