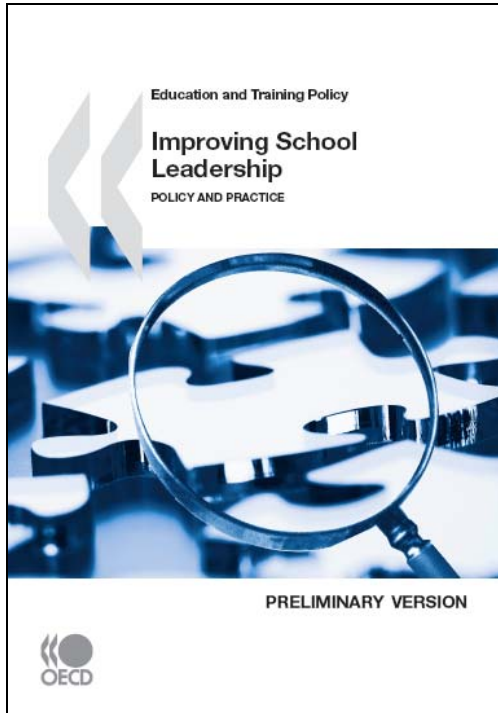


Improving School Leadership

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES



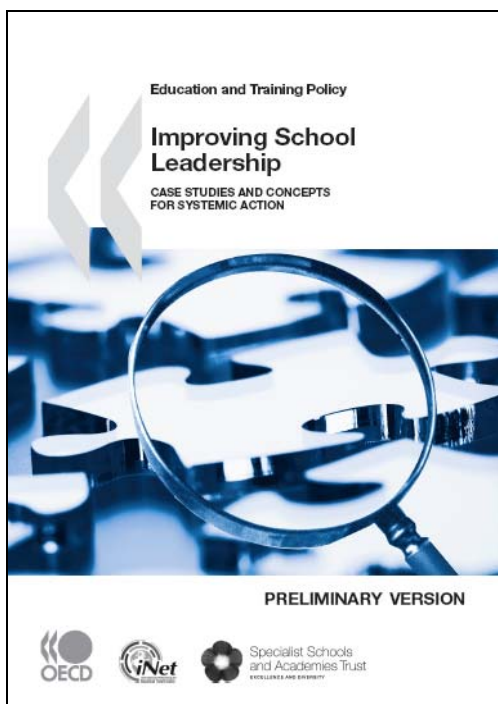
Improving School Leadership: Policy and Practice

As countries strive to reform education systems and improve student results, school leadership is high on education policy agendas. But in many countries, the men and women who run schools are overburdened, underpaid and near retirement. And there are few people lining up for their jobs.

What leadership roles are most effective in improving student learning? How to allocate and distribute different leadership tasks? How to ensure current and future school leaders develop the right skills for effective leadership? These are questions facing governments around the world.

This report is based on an OECD study of school leadership policies and practices around the world. Offering a valuable cross-country perspective, it identifies four policy levers and a range of policy options to help governments improve school leadership now and build sustainable leadership for the future.

Authors: Beatriz Pont, Deborah Nusche, Hunter Moorman



Improving School Leadership: Case Studies and Concepts for Systemic Action

The role of school leaders has changed radically as countries transform their education systems to prepare young people to function in today's world of rapid technological change, economic globalisation and increased migration and mobility.

One of the new roles they are being asked to play is to work beyond their school borders so that they can contribute not only to the success of their own school but to the success of the system as a whole.

This publication examines what the specialists are saying about system leadership and school improvement. Case studies in Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Finland and the United Kingdom (England) illustrate how countries are encouraging school leaders to become system leaders and how they are developing and training new generations of school leaders to contribute to system transformation – so that every school is a good school.

Editors: Beatriz Pont, Deborah Nusche, David Hopkins

IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: POLICY AND PRACTICE

Why school leadership matters

School leadership has become a priority in education policy agendas internationally. It plays 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.

As countries are seeking to adapt their education systems to the needs of contemporary society, expectations for schools and school leaders are changing. Many countries have moved towards decentralisation, making schools more autonomous in their decision making and holding them more accountable for results. At the same time, the requirement to improve overall student performance while serving more diverse student populations is putting schools under pressure to use more evidence-based teaching practices.

As a result of these trends, the function of school leadership across OECD countries is now increasingly defined by a demanding set of roles which include financial and human resource management and leadership for learning. There are concerns across countries that the role of principal as conceived for needs of the past is no longer appropriate. 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.

These developments have made school leadership a priority in education systems across the world. Policy makers need to enhance the quality of school leadership and make it sustainable. The OECD has identified four main policy levers which taken together can improve school leadership practice:

1. (Re)define school leadership responsibilities

Research has shown that school leaders can make a difference in school and student performance if they are granted autonomy to make important decisions. However autonomy alone does not automatically lead to improvements unless it is well supported. In addition, it is important that the core responsibilities of school leaders be clearly defined and delimited. School leadership responsibilities should be defined through an understanding of the practices most likely to improve teaching and learning. Policy makers need to:

- ***Provide higher degrees of autonomy with appropriate support***

School leaders need time, capacity and support to focus on the practices most likely to improve learning. Greater degrees of autonomy should be coupled with new models of distributed leadership, new types of accountability, and training and development for school leadership.

- ***Redefine school leadership responsibilities for improved student learning***

Policy makers and practitioners need to ensure that the roles and responsibilities associated with improved learning outcomes are at the core of school leadership practice. This study identifies four major domains of responsibility as key for school leadership to improve student outcomes:

- **Supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality:** School leaders have to be able to adapt the teaching programme to local needs, promote teamwork among teachers and engage in teacher monitoring, evaluation and professional development.
- **Goal-setting, assessment and accountability:** Policy makers need to ensure that school leaders have discretion in setting strategic direction and optimise their capacity to develop school plans and goals and monitor progress, using data to improve practice.
- **Strategic financial and human resource management:** Policy makers can enhance the financial management skills of school leadership teams by providing training to school leaders, establishing the role of a financial manager within the leadership team, or providing financial support services to schools. In addition, school leaders should be able to influence teacher recruitment decisions to improve the match between candidates and their school's needs.
- **Collaborating with other schools:** This new leadership dimension needs to be recognised as a specific role for school leaders. It can bring benefits to school systems as a whole rather than just the students of a single school. But school leaders need to develop their skills to become involved in matters beyond their school borders.

- **Develop school leadership frameworks for improved policy and practice**

School leadership frameworks can help provide guidance on the main characteristics, tasks and responsibilities of effective school leaders and signal the essential character of school leadership as leadership for learning. They can be a basis for consistent recruitment, training and appraisal of school leaders. Frameworks should clearly define the major domains of responsibility for school leaders and allow for contextualisation for local and school-level criteria. They should be developed with involvement by the profession.

2. Distribute school leadership

The increased responsibilities and accountability of school leadership are creating the need for distribution of leadership, both within schools and across schools. School boards also face many new tasks. While practitioners consider middle-management responsibilities vital for school leadership, these practices remain rare and often unclear; and those involved are not always recognized for their tasks. Policy makers need to broaden the concept of school leadership and adjust policy and working conditions accordingly.

- **Encourage distribution of leadership**

Distribution of leadership can strengthen management and succession planning. Distributing leadership across different people and organisational structures can help to meet the challenges facing contemporary schools and improve school effectiveness. This can be done in formal ways through team structures and other bodies or more informally by developing *ad hoc* groups based on expertise and current needs.

- **Support distribution of leadership**

There is a need to reinforce the concept of leadership teams in national frameworks, to develop incentive mechanisms to reward participation and performance in these teams, and to extend leadership training and development to middle-level management and potential future leaders in the school. Finally, policy makers need to reflect on modifying accountability mechanisms to match distributed leadership structures.

- **Support school boards in their tasks**

Evidence shows that effective school boards may contribute to the success of their schools. For this to happen, it is crucial to clarify the roles and responsibilities of school boards and ensure consistency between their objectives and the skills and experience of board members. Policy makers can help by providing guidelines for improved recruitment and selection processes and by developing support structures to ensure active participation in school boards, including opportunities for skills development.

3. Develop skills for effective school leadership

Country practices and evidence from different sources show that school leaders need specific training to respond to broadened roles and responsibilities. Strategies need to focus on developing and strengthening skills related to improving school outcomes (as listed above) and provide room for contextualisation.

- **Treat leadership development as a continuum**

Leadership development is broader than specific programmes of activity or intervention. It requires a combination of formal and informal processes throughout all stages and contexts of leadership practice. This implies coherently supporting the school leadership career through these stages:

- **Encourage initial leadership training:** Whether initial training is voluntary or mandatory can depend on national governance structures. Governments can define national programmes, collaborate with local level governments and develop incentives to ensure that school leaders participate. In countries where the position is not tenured, a trade-off must be found to make it worthwhile for principals to invest time in professional development. Efforts also need to be made to find the right candidates.
- **Organise induction programmes:** Induction programmes are particularly valuable to prepare and shape initial school leadership practices, and they provide vital networks for principals to share concerns and explore challenges. These programmes should provide a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge and self-study.
- **Ensure in-service training to cover need and context:** In-service programmes need to be seen in the context of prior learning opportunities for school leadership. Where there are no other initial requirements, basic in-service programmes should encourage development of leadership skills. In-service training should be also offered periodically to principals and leadership teams so they can update their skills and keep up with new developments. Networks (virtual or real) also provide informal development for principals and leadership teams.

- **Ensure consistency of provision by different institutions**

A broad range of providers cater to school leadership training needs, but the training they offer must be more consistent. In some countries, national school leadership institutions have raised awareness and improved provision of leadership development opportunities. In other countries, where there are many providers but no national orientations, it is important to have clear standards and ensure a focus on quality. Many governments have standards, evaluations and other mechanisms to monitor and regulate programme quality.

- **Ensure appropriate variety for effective training**

A broad body of knowledge supported by practice has identified the content, design, and methods of effective programmes. It points to the following key factors: curricular coherence, experience in real contexts, cohort grouping, mentoring, coaching, peer learning and structures for collaborative activity between the programme and schools.

4. Make school leadership an attractive profession

The challenge is to improve the quality of current leadership and build sustainable leadership for the future. Evidence indicates that potential applicants are deterred by the heavy workload of principals and the fact that the job does not seem to be adequately remunerated or supported. Uncertain recruitment procedures and career development prospects for principals may also deter potential candidates. Strategies to attract, recruit and support high-performing school leaders include the following:

- ***Professionalise recruitment***

Recruitment processes can have a strong impact on school leadership quality. While school-level involvement is essential to contextualise recruitment practices, action is necessary at the system level to ensure that recruitment procedures and criteria are effective, transparent and consistent. Succession planning – proactively identifying and developing potential leaders – can boost the quantity and quality of future school leaders. Eligibility criteria should be broadened to reduce the weight accorded to seniority and attract younger dynamic candidates with different backgrounds. Recruitment procedures should go beyond traditional job interviews to include an expanded set of tools and procedures to assess candidates. Finally, those who are on the hiring side of recruitment panels also need guidelines and training.

- ***Focus on the relative attractiveness of school leaders' salaries***

The relative attractiveness of salaries for school leaders can influence the supply of high quality candidates. Policy makers need to monitor remuneration compared to similar grades in the public and private sectors and make school leadership more competitive. Establishing separate salary scales for teachers and principals can attract more candidates from among the teaching staff. At the same time, salary scales 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***

Professional organisations of school leaders provide a forum for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and dissemination of best practices among professionals and between professionals and policy makers. Workforce reform is unlikely to succeed unless school leaders are actively involved in its development and implementation through their representative organisations.

- ***Provide options and support for career development***

Providing career development prospects for school leaders can help avoid principal burnout and make school leadership a more attractive career option. There are many ways to make the profession more flexible and mobile, allowing school leaders to move between schools as well as between leadership and teaching and other professions. Current country practice provides some examples to draw from, including alternatives to lifetime contracts through renewable fixed-term contracts and options for principals to step up to new opportunities such as jobs in the educational administration, leadership of groups or federations of schools, and consultant leadership roles.

IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: CASE STUDIES AND CONCEPTS FOR SYSTEMIC ACTION

The 21st century is still in its first decade, yet many countries have already seen dramatic shifts in the way schools and education systems are managed compared with those of the end of the last century. A prime stimulus for these changes is a combination of shifts in society, including greater migration, changes in social and family structures, and the use (and misuse) of information and communications technologies. Also influential is a greater emphasis on relative performance of different schools and education systems, between schools, school systems and countries.

The strong focus on education by governments and society is entirely appropriate. Only through education can we develop the knowledge and skills that are vital for our countries' economic growth, social development and political vitality. And most importantly, for the success of the children who will be our future generations.

The challenge of system leadership

In this new environment, schools and schooling are being given an ever bigger job to do. Greater decentralisation in many countries is being coupled with more school autonomy, more accountability for school and student results, and a better use of the knowledge base of education and pedagogical processes. It is also being coupled with broader responsibility for contributing to and supporting the schools' local communities, other schools and other public services.

As a result, there is a need to redefine and broaden school leaders' roles and responsibilities. This means changing the way school leadership is developed and supported. It implies improving incentives to make headship in particular more attractive for existing heads and for those who will be taking up school leadership positions in the future. And it implies strengthening training and development approaches to help leaders face these new roles.

One of school leaders' new roles is increasingly to work with other schools and other school leaders, collaborating and developing relationships of interdependence and trust. System leaders, as they are being called, care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own. Crucially they are willing to shoulder system leadership roles because they believe that in order to change the larger system you have to engage with it in a meaningful way.

This study's approach

This study focuses on a set of innovative practices that provide good examples of systemic approaches to school leadership. These are particular innovative approaches adopted or developed in Flanders (Belgium), England, Finland, Victoria (Australia) and Austria which are showing emerging evidence of positive results. Each of these cases is developed in detail in the relevant chapter of this book.

The case studies result from research and visits by OECD staff and education experts to each country. The visits included meetings and discussions with national and local government representatives, and site visits to exemplary schools. The case studies are complemented by articles by two authorities in education leadership: Richard Elmore of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and David Hopkins of the Institute of Education, University of London. The five countries visited were chosen because they met two main criteria: they demonstrated models of school organisation and management that distribute education leadership roles in innovative ways; and showed promising practices for preparing and developing school leaders.

A companion report *Improving School Leadership: Policy and Practice* (Pont *et al.*, 2008), looks at 22 countries and regions and provides a set of policy recommendations for improving school outcomes.

The benefits of system leadership

Throughout OECD countries, there is significant cooperation and collaboration on school leadership. While every country participating in the OECD activity has some arrangements for cooperation between schools, one group of jurisdictions has made system leadership the centre of their school improvement strategies. In Flanders (Belgium), England and Finland, they have done so by creating possibilities for cooperation that promote going beyond leaders' own schools to support local improvement. In Victoria (Australia) and Austria, they have launched leadership development programmes for system-wide school improvement.

These innovations focus on system-wide school improvement by encouraging and developing school leaders to work together. Although the approaches were at early stages of development, the researchers found a number of significant benefits emerging. These included development of leadership capacity, rationalising of resources, increased cooperation, leadership being distributed further into schools and across education systems, and improving school outcomes.

The challenges to practice

Nevertheless, the study also found that there are considerable challenges to overcome before the concept of system leadership can be widely implemented. Sustainability is inevitably a critical factor, as is the quality of school leaders – because *system* leaders must first be successful *school* leaders.

The key features identified were: in-school capacity to sustain high levels of student learning; between-school capability (the “glue” that is necessary for schools to work together effectively); mediating organisations to work flexibly with schools to help build in-school capacity along with the skills necessary for effective collaboration; critical mass to make system leadership a movement, not just the practice of a small number of elite leaders; and cultural consensus across the system to give school leaders the space, legitimacy and encouragement to engage in collaborative activities.

The authors note that these conditions for long-term success were not all in place in any of the case studies, but all conditions were seen in some case studies. They add that the cases that demonstrate more of these conditions are more successful in implementing system leadership. Other important factors for system leadership are: recognising and supporting system leaders; identifying and recruiting them; providing professional development; enabling school leaders to cooperate in an environment often still dominated by competition; and scaling up the innovations so that they can influence the whole education system.

Recommendations: let school leaders lead

The report's authors concluded that systemic leadership needs to come more from principals themselves and from agencies committed to working with them. They suggest that top-down approaches are not likely to work well. Developing ownership by participants, as Victoria (Australia) or the Austrian Leadership Academy are doing, is important.

A more lateral approach may be to create mediating organisations (such as the National College for School Leadership and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust in England and the Leadership Academy in Austria) to promote system leadership and collaborative activity. Another approach is to foster local education authorities and municipalities in developing and spreading practice, as the Finnish have done. The intention must be not to create a new bureaucracy but to facilitate relationships between schools so that they can collaborate for the good of all students.

There is already significant system leadership activity in the five case study countries, this report finds. System leadership can build capacity in education; share expertise, facilities and resources; encourage innovation and creativity; improve leadership and spread it more widely; and provide skills support.

The collective sharing of skills, expertise and experience will create much richer and more sustainable opportunities for rigorous transformation than can ever be provided by isolated institutions, say the authors. But attaining this future demands that we give school leaders more possibilities in taking the lead.

Activity

These reports have been prepared as part of the OECD Improving School Leadership activity. The purpose of the activity was to provide information and analysis to help policy makers formulate and implement school leadership policies leading to improved teaching and learning.

Methodology

In addition to literature on the topic and PISA data, the publications are based on country background reports by the participating countries and five case studies on innovative practices in (a) school leadership for systemic improvement and (b) training and development of school leaders. All reports are available on the OECD website at www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership.

Participating countries

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

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Forthcoming publications

Pont, B., D. Nusche and H. Moorman (2008), *Improving School Leadership: Policy and Practice*, OECD, Paris. (June 2008)

Pont, B., D. Nusche and D. Hopkins (eds.) (2008), *Improving School Leadership: Case Studies and Concepts for Systemic Action*, OECD, Paris. (June 2008)

Improving School Leadership: The Toolkit, to support policy makers and practitioners to think through reform processes for their schools and education systems. (September 2008, free download)

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