

# Improving School Leadership Policy and Practice

POINTERS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT





## Table of Contents

Why school leadership matters.....	5
(Re)define school leadership responsibilities.....	6
Distribute school leadership.....	7
Develop skills for effective school leadership .....	8
Make school leadership an attractive profession .....	9
System leadership .....	10

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. A complementary report *Improving School Leadership Vol. 2 Case Studies on System Leadership*, presents case studies on developing system leadership beyond school borders. Background reports prepared by 21 countries, the Improving School Leadership Toolkit and other documents of the review are also available on the OECD website <http://www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership>.





## Why school leadership matters

### 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.
- 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.
- But 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.
- 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, presented below.



## Re(define) school leadership responsibilities

### PROVIDE MORE AUTONOMY TO SCHOOL LEADERS, WITH APPROPRIATE SUPPORT

- Move towards greater autonomy for school leaders in countries where school leadership is less developed
- Ensure that school leaders have the capacity, motivation and support to make use of their autonomy to improve teaching and learning
- Accompany school autonomy with new models of more distributed leadership, new types of accountability and training and development for school leaders

### REDEFINE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVED STUDENT LEARNING

- Encourage school leaders to support, evaluate and develop teacher quality by:
  - strengthening school leaders' responsibility for adapting the curriculum to local needs
  - providing training for school leaders in teacher monitoring and evaluation
  - enhancing the role of school leaders in teacher professional development so that it is relevant to the local school context
  - encouraging school leaders to promote teamwork among teachers
- Support goal-setting, assessment and accountability by:
  - providing school leaders with discretion to set the school's strategic direction and develop school plans in line with national curriculum standards but also responsive to local needs
  - promoting "data-wise" leadership through support and training opportunities for school leaders
  - encouraging school leaders to distribute assessment and accountability tasks to people within schools capable of using data to design appropriate improvement strategies
- Enhance strategic financial and human resource management by:
  - strengthening financial management skills of school leadership teams through training, appointing a school bursar with budgeting qualifications or financial management support to schools
  - involving school leaders in teacher recruitment decisions
- Adopt a systemic approach to leadership policy and practice by:
  - encouraging school leaders to cooperate actively with surrounding schools and local community
  - distributing leadership responsibilities within schools so that school leaders can engage in activities beyond the school

### DEVELOP SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORKS FOR IMPROVED POLICY AND PRACTICE

- Build on commitment, not compliance, with representatives from the school leadership profession involved in the formulation and development of the frameworks
- Provide definitions of school leaders' major domains of responsibility based on effective leadership practice and concrete needs of national education systems
- Use frameworks to provide coherence to different domains of school leadership policy, e.g. recruitment, training and appraisal of school leaders



## Distribute school leadership

### ENCOURAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LEADERSHIP

- Develop leadership teams and distribute tasks formally by establishing institutional team structures and other bodies
- Develop *ad hoc* groups based on contextual or current challenges or needs with participation based on expertise rather than on position
- Encourage distribution of leadership across teaching and other school staff to strengthen succession planning and management
- Distribute leadership across schools to benefit from economies of scale, especially in smaller schools with fewer staff

### SUPPORT DISTRIBUTION OF LEADERSHIP

- Extend leadership development to middle level management and to potential leaders in the school
- Consider modifying accountability mechanisms to match distributed leadership structures
- Reinforce the concept of distributed leadership teams in national frameworks and develop incentive mechanisms to reward participation and performance in these teams

### SUPPORT SCHOOL BOARDS IN THEIR TASKS

- Ensure consistency between the objectives and expectations of school boards
- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of boards towards schools and principals and ensure appropriate support to board members
- Improve recruitment and selection processes to encourage representativeness, high quality and engaged candidates with suitable skills
- Develop support structures to ensure active participation in school boards, with opportunities for skills development on topics related to school governance, including school evaluation and school improvement



## Develop skills for effective school leadership

### DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS TO STRENGTHEN PRACTICE

- Develop and strengthen skills for leadership that contribute to improving school outcomes, especially to:
  - support, evaluate and develop teacher quality
  - support goal setting, assessment and accountability
  - enhance strategic financial and human resource management
  - lead beyond the school borders
- Ensure targeted provision of training programmes in areas of special need or for special contexts

### TREAT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AS A CONTINUUM

- Encourage leadership initial training by:
  - fostering collaboration between national and local governments to define national programmes and develop incentives to ensure participation of school leaders
  - including school leadership topics in teacher training and setting up preparatory qualifications or “taster courses” to select, screen and prepare future school leaders
- Organise induction programmes that combine theoretical and practical knowledge as well as self-study and are coherent with the broader development framework
- Ensure in-service training to cover need and context by:
  - designing in-service programmes that reflect prior learning opportunities for school leadership
  - providing periodic in-service training and setting up networks (virtual or real) for principals and leadership teams to update their skills or inform them of new developments

### ENSURE COHERENT PROVISION ACROSS DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS

- Training can be provided by Ministries of Education or local governments or outsourced to specialised institutions, to teacher training institutions or to a specialised body established to focus on school leadership training or provided by universities
- Consider developing national institutions of school leadership to raise awareness, improve knowledge and provision of leadership development opportunities in countries without such institutions
- In countries without any national orientation but having a range of institutions catering to local or regional needs, set clear standards to ensure that suppliers focus on good leadership development
- Looks for ways to collaborate with the private sector on leadership development

### ENSURE APPROPRIATE VARIETY FOR EFFECTIVE TRAINING

- Consider curricular coherence, experience in real contexts, cohort grouping, mentoring, coaching and peer learning and structure for collaborative activity between the programme and the schools when establishing the content, design and methods of programmes



## Make school leadership an attractive profession

### PROFESSIONALISE RECRUITMENT

- Consider recruiting managers and leaders with different backgrounds and expertise for certain functions within leadership teams. These could be drawn from outside the education sector.
- Plan for leadership succession by proactively identifying potential leaders and encouraging them to develop their leadership practices and:
  - offer training programmes for aspiring leaders
  - establish contact between young teachers and current leaders
  - include leadership topics in initial teacher training
- Provide more elements to evaluate candidates such as competency profiles or leadership frameworks and put less weight on seniority.
- Provide guidelines and training for those on recruitment panels and encourage the use of recruitment tools to assess a wider range of knowledge, skills and competences.

### MAKE SCHOOL LEADERS' SALARIES MORE ATTRACTIVE

- Compare salaries of school leaders with similar grades in the public and private sectors to keep the profession competitive and attract the best qualified graduates.
- Establish separate salary scales for teachers and principals.
- Establish salary scales reflecting leadership structures to improve the school level distribution of responsibilities in a leadership team context and to pay principals a sufficient salary premium over other staff to compensate for additional workload.
- Link salaries to school level factors, allowing substantial salary increases for school leaders in difficult areas.
- Make a balanced use of performance-related rewards. In systems using performance-related pay, develop reliable indicators and clear assessment criteria to ensure that assessment procedures take account of the context in which principals are working.

### ACKNOWLEDGE THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS OF SCHOOL LEADERS

- Encourage involvement of school leaders in professional organisations which provide a forum for dialogue, knowledge sharing and dissemination of best practice both among professionals and between professionals and policy makers.

### PROVIDE OPTIONS AND SUPPORT FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- Provide renewable fixed term contracts for principals to periodically reassess and acknowledge well-performing principals and encourage them to continuously develop their skills and improve their practice.
- Plan and provide opportunities for principals to step up towards new opportunities such as jobs in educational administration, leadership of federations of schools or consultant leadership

## THE CHALLENGE OF SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

- 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.
- The OECD study *Improving School Leadership, Vol. 2: Case Studies on System Leadership* focuses on a set of innovative practices of systemic approaches to school leadership adopted or developed in Flanders (Belgium), England, Finland, Victoria (Australia) and Austria. They were chosen because they met two main criteria: they demonstrated models of school organisation and management that distribute leadership roles in innovative ways; and showed promising practices for preparing and developing school leaders.

## 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

- 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 for sustainability are: 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 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. 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

- Systemic leadership needs to come more from principals themselves and from agencies committed to working with them. 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.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

### Activity

These reports were 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.

### 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).

### Publications

Pont, B., D. Nusche and H. Moorman (2008), *Improving School Leadership, Volume 1: Policy and Practice*, OECD, Paris. The report has been translated into Korean, Estonian, Japanese and Lithuanian.

Pont, B., D. Nusche and D. Hopkins (eds.) (2008), *Improving School Leadership, Volume 2: Case Studies on System Leadership*, OECD, Paris.

*Improving School Leadership: The Toolkit*, to support policy makers and practitioners to think through reform processes for their schools and education systems.

For further information or free download of the publications please visit the website [www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership](http://www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership) or contact Beatriz Pont, [beatriz.pont@oecd.org](mailto:beatriz.pont@oecd.org).