



Executive summary

Instructional and distributed leadership are regarded as important for creating and sustaining professional learning communities and for creating a climate conducive to student learning. Instructional leadership comprises leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, co-ordination and improvement of teaching and learning. Distributed leadership in schools is not only a reflection of leadership being shown by the principal, but also of others acting as leaders in school.

Four types of leaders and leadership are identified in this study, based on their instructional and distributed leadership, as well as their involvement in educational activities with their school. The first type – “integrated leadership” – refers to principals who are attentive to both instructional and distributed leadership in their schools and spend considerable time on curriculum and teaching-related tasks in their school. “Inclusive leaders” engage staff, students and their parents or guardians in the decisions at school, but relatively less often take up a role as instructional leaders and spend less time on curriculum and teaching-related tasks in school. “Educational leaders” are strongly engaged in instructional leadership, but much less in involving stakeholders in the decisions at school. “Administrative leadership” refers to principals who spend a large portion of their time on school management and administrative issues and are, as a result, less engaged in distributed and instructional leadership activities than integrated leaders.

Further on, this study examines how these leadership types relate to the establishment of professional learning communities and a learning climate in schools. At the core of the emphasis on professional learning communities is the idea that knowledge is situated in the day-to-day experiences of teachers and is best understood through critical reflection with others who share the same experience. Moreover, teachers who actively engage in professional learning communities will be able to increase their professional knowledge, which might lead to the enhancement of student learning. In this study, professional learning communities are characterised by a reflective dialogue among staff, deprivatisation of practice, a collective focus on student learning, collaboration and a shared sense of purpose. “Learning climate” refers to the establishment of an orderly climate for learning and positive teacher-student relationships within the school.

The findings in this report are based on the data of the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013. The results, unless stated otherwise, relate to principals and teachers in lower secondary education.

KEY FINDINGS

Based on what principals reported, in most countries and economies, principals are actively engaged in instructional leadership actions, such as supporting co-operation among teachers to develop new teaching practices and ensuring that teachers take responsibility for the learning outcomes of their students and for improving their own teaching skills. Despite this widespread engagement in instructional leadership practices across systems, about one-third of all principals do not actively support these actions and further stimulation of leadership for learning is needed.

Instructional leadership is more common in schools with teacher collaboration. This suggests that when principals take action to support co-operation among teachers to develop new teaching practices, teachers may be more inclined to collaborate.

Instructional leadership seems to be a strong predictor of the establishment of reflective dialogues between teachers at all educational levels. This means that, in schools in which principals are more engaged in instructional leadership, teachers more often perceive a positive change in their instruction as a result of feedback on their classroom management practices, their teaching practices and their use of student assessments to improve learning.

Principals who participated in training or a course in instructional leadership were more engaged in instructional leadership actions in their school. This suggests that instructional leadership in schools can be fostered by including instructional leadership training in leadership preparation programmes, or by encouraging principals to take courses in which these skills are developed.

Across countries and economies, nearly all schools involve their staff in the decision-making process at school. Schools and systems differ, however, with regard to opportunities offered to students and their parents or guardians to be involved in school decisions.

A stronger focus on distributed leadership is related to a greater sense of purpose within a school, at all educational levels. This finding suggests that involving students and their parents or guardians, in addition to the staff of the school, creates a culture of shared responsibility for school issues, which is characterised by mutual support among all stakeholders. Teachers are more often involved in reflective dialogue and collaborative activities in lower secondary schools in which distributed leadership is more common.

Positive teacher-student relationships are more common in schools with distributed leadership in all educational levels. Schools creating opportunities for students and their parents or guardians to participate in school decisions means teachers are interested in what students have to say and are likely to be concerned with students' well being. Thus, distributed leadership may result in a greater sense of belonging among students and parents, as well as common responsibility for the functioning of the school among all key stakeholders.

Schools with principals showing integrated leadership, i.e. balancing elements of both distributed and instructional leadership, are more often associated with characteristics of professional learning communities – such as teachers engaging in reflective dialogue and collaboration – than schools with inclusive leaders. Similarly, schools with integrated leaders are linked, more often than schools with educational leaders, to a shared sense of purpose among their staff and a collective focus on student learning.



Principals have only limited, and mostly indirect, influence on establishing a learning climate in their school. Learning climates are strongly dependent on teacher competencies and features of the school context and student population.

Specific types of school leadership are more prominent in certain countries and economies than others, which might indicate that leadership practices are idiosyncratic to each national context. Depending on the type of leadership, around 40–60% of principals' practices might be explained by system differences, which could indicate that principals' actions are particularly susceptible to the influence of national contexts, such as the legal framework in which a principal works, or a principal's working status.

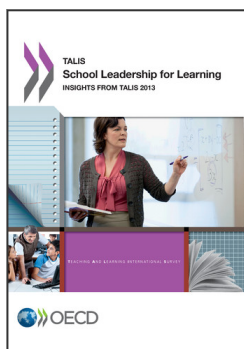
POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Schools in lower secondary education function only partially as professional learning communities. There is still some potential to improve reflective practice, deprivatisation of practice, a collective focus on student learning, teacher collaboration and a shared sense of purpose in lower secondary schools. **Educational policy can point to the importance of these features in secondary education, thus creating necessary prerequisites for change.**

Integrated leadership, combining instructional and distributed leadership and using student outcomes to develop the school's goals, programme and professional development plan, appears to be the most favourable approach to establishing such a learning community at schools. **Countries and economies may adopt this view of leadership for their schools and can stimulate this through training programmes for principals and by encouraging principals to keep up to date with developments in their field through in-service training, attendance of leadership courses or other professional development activities.**

Professional learning communities may have less added value in systems with a highly qualified teacher force. In these countries and economies, professional learning communities may, nevertheless, safeguard continuous improvement better than relying only on teachers' individual competencies. At the same time, professional learning communities are based on the premise that teachers can learn from each other. This might be problematic in some schools with several or many less-competent teachers. **School leaders, school boards and governmental agencies, as well as providers of teacher training programmes and courses, have a role in shaping and sustaining teachers' professional development.**

Teacher and classroom factors, rather than the role of educational leaders, play a more important role in developing a learning climate in class. This is especially important in public-sector schools in larger cities, where there is likely to be a larger number of disadvantaged students. **In dealing with students from disadvantaged families and students with special educational needs, teachers might benefit from reflection on their practice by consulting colleagues in the school and by classroom observation of their colleagues to address these students effectively.**



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