



Executive Summary

What do you need to create a responsive 21st-century school? Three key ingredients are teachers who are confident in their ability to teach, a willingness to innovate, and strong school leaders who establish the conditions in their schools that enable the former two ingredients to flourish. This report, *Schools for 21st-Century Learners: Strong Leaders, Confident Teachers, Innovative Approaches*, uses evidence from the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the OECD Innovative Learning Environments project to identify school- and system-level policies that promote effective school leadership, strengthen teacher's sense of self-efficacy, and encourage innovation in creating 21st-century learning environments.

PROMOTING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Effective school leaders are those who can make evidence-informed decisions, provide the instructional leadership that teachers need to help all their students succeed in school, and create a collaborative school environment in which teachers take part in school decisions. Analysis of TALIS data finds that when teachers participate in decision making in their schools, they report greater confidence in their own ability to teach (self-efficacy). TALIS also finds that school leaders who provide their staff with opportunities to share in decision making tend to report greater job satisfaction.

- **Empower teachers to play a role in decision making at the school level**

Distributed leadership is not only important to help alleviate some of the burden imposed on school leaders, but it can be beneficial to teachers as well. Policy makers should consider providing guidance on distributed leadership and distributed decision making at the system level.

- **Provide opportunities for, and remove barriers to, continuing professional development for principals**

In many countries, large proportions of principals reported that there were no relevant opportunities available for professional development and no incentives to participate. Many principals said their work schedules conflicted with opportunities to develop their professional skills. Countries should set standards for high-quality professional learning, aligned with the country's long-term education goals, and ensure that principals can participate in these learning opportunities. In turn, principals must take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

- **Ensure that principals receive training in, and have opportunities to assume, instructional leadership**

Instructional leadership – focusing on the teaching and learning that take place in school – may be the most important of all principals' tasks. TALIS data show that when principals reported higher levels of instructional leadership, they were also more likely to develop a professional-development plan for their school, observe teaching in the classroom as part of a teacher's formal appraisal, and report there is high level of mutual respect among colleagues at the school. While more training in instructional leadership is needed, principals also need to be made aware of its importance and be offered this training during their initial principal training.

STRENGTHENING TEACHERS' CONFIDENCE IN THEIR OWN ABILITIES

In all countries/economies that participated in TALIS, teachers who reported that they are given opportunities to participate in decision making at school also reported greater job satisfaction and, in most countries, greater self-efficacy. Teachers in nearly all countries who reported that they participate in collaborative professional learning activities five times a year or more also reported significantly higher levels of self-efficacy.

- **Build teachers' capacity to provide instruction for all types of learners**

Those teachers who reported spending more time keeping order in the classroom also reported less self-efficacy. Initial teacher education should include sufficiently long periods for teachers to practice in a variety of schools. More flexible classroom situations, such as team teaching, might also allow teachers to share the tasks of teaching and disciplining students.



- **Support the development of interpersonal relationships within the school**

Positive interpersonal relationships with the school leader, other teachers, and students can mitigate the otherwise detrimental effects that challenging classrooms might have on a teacher's satisfaction with his or her job or feelings of self-efficacy. School leaders can provide a physical space in which teachers can meet with each other, or time away from class or other administrative work to allow teachers to meet and develop relationships with students and colleagues. Government policies can give school leaders the organisational freedom to make changes in the school day or school building to help. Teachers need to be open and willing to engage with their colleagues, their administration and their students.

- **Encourage collaboration among teachers**

It is clear from TALIS data that teachers benefit from even minimal amounts of collaboration with colleagues. Collaborative practices, such as observing other teachers' classes and providing feedback, or teaching as a team in the same class, could – and should – be introduced at school. School leaders could make schedules more flexible to allow for team teaching.

INNOVATING TO CREATE 21ST-CENTURY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Some schools are responding to 21st-century learning needs by regrouping teachers, regrouping learners, rescheduling learning and changing pedagogical approaches.

- **Collaborate and communicate**

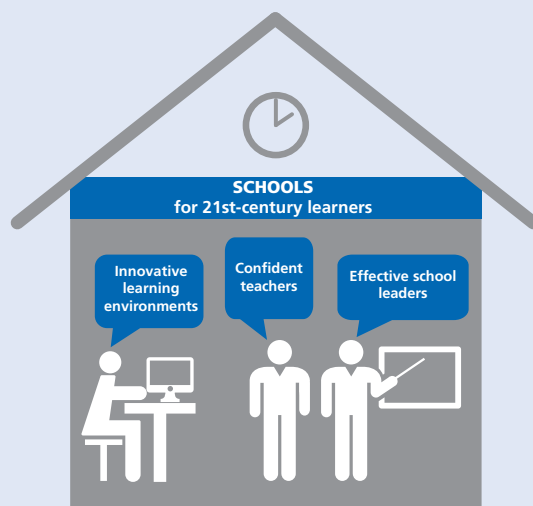
The mere presence of technology in the classroom, in the form of computers or tablets in a school or in mobile phones in the pockets of learners, is not sufficient to foster true innovation in the classroom. All education stakeholders should join together so that the drive to innovate in education is felt throughout the education system, not only in isolated areas. Teachers can play a crucial role as catalysts for change. Wider partnerships and connections should also be constructed, particularly when resources are scarce.

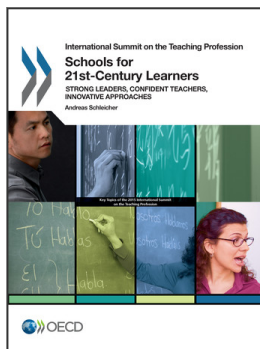
- **Create conditions conducive to innovation**

Information about the learning taking place in school should be fed back to the various education stakeholders, and incorporated into revised strategies for learning and further innovation. This means that processes for self-evaluation should be in place and that the knowledge base should be developed continually through meaningful research that engages the worlds of policy and practice.

- **Ensure coherence**

Learning-focused networks and communities of practice should be supported, and coherence with overarching education strategies should be ensured. Ministries and country-level education agencies should provide the legitimacy and the system-wide perspective to push innovation. Ideally, leadership from the local level, from networks and partnerships, and from education authorities at central and local levels should all be working together to create responsive 21st-century learning systems.





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