

## Executive summary

**A**cross OECD countries, more than 12% of public spending is invested in education. Yet as international surveys like the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show, there is considerable variation in how that money is spent and the outcomes it produces. This first edition of the *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen* aims to help policy makers and other stakeholders in education learn how their peers in other countries respond to common challenges, from teaching diverse student populations to instituting measures that render schools accountable for the quality of the education they provide. The report offers a detailed look at some 450 education reforms that were adopted across OECD countries between 2008 and 2014. While these policies were developed in specific contexts, they can serve as inspiration for policy makers who are looking for effective ways to improve their own education systems.

### Trends in education policies

Nearly one in five 15-year-old students in OECD countries does not acquire the minimum skills necessary to participate fully in today's society. Some 16% of recent reforms focus on ensuring **quality and equity** in education. Many countries have prioritised policies to support disadvantaged students or schools with diverse student populations. These policies include New Zealand's support to their Māori and Pasifika populations, England's Pupil Premium and Chile's Law on Preferential Subsidies. Meanwhile, Australia and Poland have focused on enlarging enrolment in, and improving the quality of, early childhood education and care.

Some 29% of reform measures considered in the report aim to better **prepare students for the future**. To this end, many countries have focused on improving the quality and relevance of their vocational education and training (VET) programmes or expanding their work-based training and apprenticeship systems. Portugal introduced a comprehensive VET strategy, while Denmark and Sweden reformed their VET programmes. Many countries also introduced policies to ensure that students can find a job or a place in further education. National qualifications frameworks have also been revised, often in collaboration with the European Union, to increase transparency across education systems.

Countries have also focused on **school improvement** (24% of reform measures considered in this report address this issue), with the aim of developing positive learning environments and attracting and retaining quality staff. Policies related to teachers have been a priority: Australia created the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, and the Netherlands developed a Teacher Programme. France and the United States concentrated on improving initial teacher training, while Finland adopted measures

to create a system of professional development for school staff. Some of the Nordic countries and Japan reformed their curricula.

To guide their reform efforts, school systems rely on **evaluation and assessment**. Some 14% of the policies under discussion targeted this facet of education. Chile and Mexico, for example, strengthened their evaluation institutions. With its VALES project, Italy has introduced policies to develop tools and processes to support internal and external evaluations of schools.

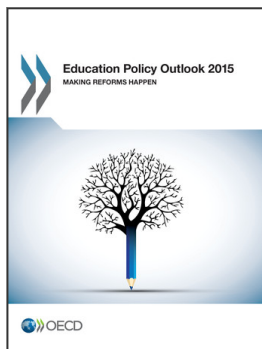
Given that the **governance** of education systems is becoming increasingly complex (9% of reforms in this dataset address governance issues), some countries have elaborated overarching visions for their education systems (Denmark's *Folkeskole* reform and Canada's nationally agreed strategies and priorities) or have refined roles and responsibilities, either by creating new institutions or by reorganising local governance arrangements (Estonia). **Funding** reforms (12% of all reform measures considered in the report) have been widespread at the system level ("Race to the Top" in the United States and Germany's "Investing in the Future"), the institution level (Mexico's "Dignified Schools" programme and Belgium's school-funding reforms), and at the level of the individual student (New Zealand).

## Successful implementation of policies

Education reform can only be effective if policies are well implemented. This means that, to support reforms in evaluation and assessment, there must be a coherent framework in place, with sufficient capacity for conducting and interpreting evaluations at all levels of the education system. To be introduced successfully innovations in the learning environment must concretely address specific teaching and learning issues. And to improve the quality of the education that schools provide, policies must focus on changing classroom practices, balancing external pressure and support, and developing and pursuing long-term objectives.

More generally, the analysis of selected reforms shows that the most effective policies are designed around students and learning, build teachers' capacity, and engage all stakeholders. In most OECD countries, teachers' unions and business organisations, in particular, are becoming increasingly involved in policy implementation. Teachers' unions are calling for more structured dialogue with governments, while the business sector is keen to establish closer links with education systems.

As important, the analysis shows that once new policies are adopted, there is little follow-up. Only 10% of the policies considered in this dataset have been evaluated for their impact. Measuring policy impact more rigorously and consistently will not only be cost-effective in the long run, it is also essential for developing the most useful, practicable and successful education policy options.



**From:**  
**Education Policy Outlook 2015**  
Making Reforms Happen

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264225442-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2015), "Executive summary", in *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264225442-4-en>

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