



Chapter 4

TEACHER ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Learning outcomes at school are the result of what happens in classrooms, thus only reforms that are successfully implemented in classrooms can be expected to be effective. One of the key conclusions of the Summit was that teacher engagement in the development and implementation of educational reform is crucial and school reform will not work unless it is supported from the bottom up. This requires those responsible for change to both communicate their aims well and involve the stakeholders who are affected. But it also requires teachers to contribute as the architects of change, not just its implementers. Some of the most successful reforms are those supported by strong unions rather than those that keep the union role weak.



Significant improvement
is possible.

ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL REFORM THAT WORKS

While there continue to be major unresolved issues in the debate on effective teacher policies, both within and between countries, the Summit participants agreed that significant improvement is possible. Contrary to what is often assumed, a high-quality teaching force is not due simply to a traditional cultural respect for teachers but is a result of deliberate policy choices, carefully implemented over time. The highest performing countries show that thoughtfully designed and purposefully executed systemic efforts can build a high-quality teacher workforce.

Tough-minded collaboration
beats tough-minded
confrontation.

The previous chapters have discussed a range of features of school reform that can help make teachers more effective. These led to a key purpose of the Summit, which was examining how to achieve reforms that work for pupils through a constructive social dialogue between educational authorities and the organized teaching profession. The Summit revealed a strong consensus between governments and teacher organizations alike that major system improvement is essential and that there needs to be both pressure and support for people to get better. The Summit also revealed significant overlap between the professional conditions teachers are looking for and what is needed for school improvement but also areas where they may not be aligned.⁴² Societies have different political traditions to be managed and the tensions between different stakeholder groups and within stakeholder groups, including teacher organizations and governments, are real. But many systems have found ways to work constructively with teacher organizations by establishing structures and processes for consultation, both at the school and the national level. Inclusive, consultative policy processes are slower and do not prevent conflict but over time, such an approach seems to pay dividends.

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Fundamental changes to the status quo can raise uncertainties that can trigger resistance from stakeholders, and without the active and willing engagement of teachers, most educational reforms fail. The chances for success in reform improve through effective consultation, a willingness to compromise and, above all, through the involvement of teachers in the planning and implementation of reform. In moving beyond consultation to involvement, the reform process becomes oriented towards transforming schools into learning organizations, with teaching professionals in the lead.

At the same time, stakeholder groups should not be able to exercise a veto over educational reforms that are mandated through democratic political processes. To do so would be to risk losing the public support on which education so critically depends. It is difficult to find the right balance, but open and ongoing systematic dialogue and consultation are fundamental to the process. Such dialogue should recognize that teachers are experts in teaching and learning and thus can make an essential contribution to the design of reforms. This chapter sets out some issues to be tackled, without pretending to offer a blueprint for how to engage teachers.

Given the uncertainties that
accompany change, stakeholders
often value the status quo.
To address this, systems
need to become better at
communicating and building
support for change.

As in other areas of the public sector, reform can be harder if it is resisted by stakeholders who feel that they stand to lose from change. It is therefore not enough to design reforms capable of changing learning outcomes; to succeed, they need to address the legitimate concerns of stakeholders so that they are supported by those who deliver the system. This is a big challenge, in light of evidence that agents often prefer avoiding potential losses to acquiring potential gains, and to over-estimate the costs and/or under-estimate the benefits of change relative to the status quo.

In this sense, teachers are not exceptional in tending to protect the system they know in the face of uncertainty and failed reform in the past. However, this phenomenon is multiplied in educational reform because of the range of actors, including students, parents, teachers, employers and trade unions, who have stakes in educational outcomes. Uncertainty about costs is problematic because education infrastructure is large and implicates multiple levels of government, each of which is trying to minimize or shift the costs of reform.⁴³



Moreover, provider interests tend to be well organized and generally command greater public trust than do politicians. It can be hard for the latter to make the case for reform on grounds of policy outcomes, because there is no consensus about how to assess outcomes in education. This is partly due to the complex mix of goals to be pursued (equity, efficiency, quality, choice, cost-containment, etc.), but it also reflects the lack of reliable, generally accepted indicators concerning the quality of educational outcomes and their value. Evidence-based reform is difficult where the evidence base is either lacking or contested. One consequence of this is that isolated facts or bits of data, or the emergence of a single high-profile study, can have a disproportionate impact on policy debates.

In overcoming these obstacles, education systems need to employ state-of-the-art knowledge, professional know-how and adequate institutional arrangements to disseminate information and lessons about the new tasks and responsibilities inherent in the reforms. Successful reforms have often involved significant investment in staff development, or clustering reforms to build up support for them in related institutions.

In September 2008, General Directors of Education Ministries in OECD countries met to discuss why some educational reforms succeed and others fail. They considered how to engage parents, teachers, and politicians to support reforms, and what changes the minds of stakeholders who initially resist reforms or their implementation. Several recurrent themes emerged from their exchange of experiences:

Experience of reform produces some useful pointers about how to engage teachers in educational reform.

- Policy makers need to build consensus on the aims of educational reform and actively engage stakeholders, especially teachers, in formulating and implementing policy responses.
- Some reforms capitalize on external pressures or crises as part of building a compelling case for change.
- All political players and stakeholders need to develop more realistic expectations about the pace and nature of reforms to improve outcomes.
- Reforms need to be backed by sustainable financing.
- There is some shift away from reform initiatives per se towards building self-adjusting systems with rich feedback at all levels, incentives to react, and tools to strengthen capacities to deliver better outcomes.
- Investment is needed in change-management skills in the education system. Teachers need reassurance that they will be given the tools to change and recognition of their professional motivation to improve outcomes for their students.
- Evidence can be used more effectively to guide policy making, combining international benchmarks with national surveys and with inspectorates to achieve a better diagnosis.
- Evidence is most helpful when it is fed back to institutions along with information and tools about how they can use the information to improve outcomes.
- “Whole-of-government” approaches can include education in more comprehensive reforms. These need effective co-ordination and overall leadership across all the relevant ministries.

The OECD’s recent review of reforms in public policy⁴⁴ suggests that, in most circumstances, it pays to closely engage those who will be most directly affected by reform. Inclusive, consultative policy processes are no guarantee against conflict when sensitive reforms are under consideration, but over time, such an approach seems to pay dividends. In particular, it can create greater trust among the parties involved (Box 4.2). This may make all stakeholders more willing to rely on commitments to steps that will mitigate the cost of reform for them.



Research literature devotes a great deal of attention to the question of when and how potential losers of reform might be compensated, whether by exempting them from the reform, at least for some period, or via some sort of alternative compensation. Failure to compensate may reinforce opposition to reform, while excessive compensation may be costly or may simply blunt the effects of the reform itself. It may also reinforce opposition to future reforms, as the perceived weakness of the government encourages agents to push for maximum concessions.

Teachers need to be active agents, not just in the implementation of reforms, but also in their design...

As noted before, teacher support for reform is also not merely an issue of politics and pragmatism. Research on the characteristics of effective professional development indicates that teachers must be active agents in analyzing their own practice in the light of professional standards, and their students' progress in the light of standards for student learning. Such engagement necessitates a clear and well-structured policy framework for reform. This depends greatly on the specific institutions and traditions of any given country. However, in every reform context, the roles and competencies of each actor need to be clearly defined. There should also be a strong commitment to sharing information, and to building trust and co-operation, as well as an explicit high-level commitment to the reform agenda from each partner.

...and reform must be underpinned by solid research and analysis.

Teacher engagement also requires consistent, co-ordinated efforts to persuade those affected of the need for reform and, in particular, to communicate the costs of non-reform. This may be particularly challenging when the opportunity costs of maintaining the status quo are less apparent than the costs of change.

Last but not least, policy design needs to be underpinned by solid research and analysis. If reform advocates can build a broad consensus among experts and the public in support of reform, and build that consensus by showing evidence of the need for reform, they are likely to be in a stronger position to implement the reforms successfully.

Recognition of the importance of engaging teachers is growing. Dialogue can involve conversations both within national professional bodies and among local groups of professionals.

At a political level, the commitment to working in partnership with teachers to reform education is growing. When OECD Education Ministers met in Dublin in March 2004, there was a clear recognition of the importance of teacher engagement: "It is vital that teachers and their professional organizations are fully engaged in the debate about educational reform, and in the implementation of change." Ministers committed themselves to consultative and participatory processes, and were encouraged by the reports from some countries of the lead that teacher organizations were taking in designing new approaches to teacher appraisal and career structures.⁴⁵ The importance of teacher engagement was also noted by the ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel in 2003: "Social dialogue is the glue for successful educational reform. Without full involvement of teachers and their organizations – those most responsible for implementing reform – in key aspects of educational objectives and policies, education systems cannot hope to achieve quality education for all."⁴⁶ However, the Committee also observed that "social dialogue in education remains a fragile process of decision making in most [countries]." In 2006, the Committee noted: "The basic prerequisites for dialogue are a democratic culture, respect for rules and laws, and institutions or mechanisms that permit individuals to express their views individually or collectively through unions or associations on issues that affect their daily lives on both a personal and professional basis...this implies respect for professional freedom and the active participation of individual teachers in deciding a range of professional issues – curricula, pedagogy, student assessment and issues relating to the organization of education ... educational authorities and teacher unions should try to jointly analyze problems and find solutions. Participatory processes and consultations are not a panacea to resolve ... difficulties, but they are virtually the only mechanisms for overcoming suspicion and establishing a positive climate for making and implementing education policy."⁴⁷



In addition to consultative mechanisms, there are also institutional arrangements that can help to promote dialogue and engage teachers and their professional associations in policy formation. Several countries have institutional arrangements providing teachers and other stakeholder groups with both a forum for policy development and, critically, a mechanism for profession-led standard-setting and quality-assurance in teacher education, teacher induction, teacher performance and career development (Boxes 4.1 to 4.6). Such organizations seek to obtain for teaching the combination of professional autonomy and public accountability that has long characterized other professions, such as medicine, engineering and law. This provides teachers with greater input into the criteria for entry to their profession, the standards for career advancement, and the basis on which ineffective teachers should leave the profession. Such an approach is also consistent with the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Teachers, an instrument supported by UNESCO, ILO and OECD member states as well as teachers' unions.

Box 4.1. Involving unions in reform in Australia

Teacher unions are engaging in setting professional standards across the country.

National Professional Standards for Teachers were finalized by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and endorsed by federal and state ministers in late December 2010. The Standards make explicit what teachers should know and be able to do across four career stages – graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead teacher – and across the three domains of professional knowledge, practice and engagement. AITSL includes the national education union in an independent structure that provides national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. AITSL has responsibility for rigorous national professional standards, fostering and driving high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders, working collaboratively across jurisdictions, and engaging with key professional bodies.

Box 4.2. Building trust in Finland

Finnish teachers have long enjoyed high professional status but only recently gained the level of trust that allows them to take responsibility for educational change.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to reform has to do with trust. Trust cannot be legislated. The strong role that trust plays in the relationship between government and teachers in Finland has suggested to some that lessons from Finland may be less relevant to other countries, especially if one views trust as a precondition for the kinds of deep institutional reforms embodied in the development of the comprehensive school. But in the case of the relationship between teachers and the larger society, the Finnish experience also shows that trust is at least as much a consequence of policy decisions as it is a pre-existing culture.

Finland has adopted a stance in which it is assumed that students will perform at their best when their teachers' morale is high, and teachers' morale will not be high if they perceive themselves to be under attack by the authorities. Trust in this case means eliciting teachers' views on what needs to be done to improve student performance, acting to the extent possible on those views, and working hard to help teachers develop the capacity required to meet their students' needs. Given the respect that teachers have historically enjoyed in Finland, there was a solid base on which to build reforms. But Finnish teachers only latterly gained their high level of autonomy over curriculum, assessment and other decisions. This granting of trust from the government, coupled with their newfound status as university graduates from highly selective programs, empowered teachers to practice their profession in ways that deepened the trust accorded them by parents and others in the community.



In addition to system-level consultative mechanisms and policy-making bodies, it is also important that teacher engagement occurs at the school level. This can mean teachers taking responsibility for local change as members of “learning communities”.

Box 4.3. School-level teacher involvement in Sweden

The principle of consensus is a central feature of the Swedish decision-making process.

Dialogue and collaboration among various parties in the education sector is common, although it does not always result in consensus on changes in education policy. At the central government level, representatives of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the teachers’ unions often participate as experts in government committees or consultation groups on school policy. Stakeholders may also present their views through review bodies in connection with official inquiries and government proposals. Apart from such organized collaboration arrangements, various forms of talks and meetings offer opportunities for dialogue and consultations among parties.

At the local level and in individual schools, the Co-determination at Work Act guarantees that employers consult with employees before making major decisions about their workplace. Moreover, the employee representatives concluded an agreement in 1992 that sets the framework for collaboration in the workplace. Under this agreement, employers and teachers seek to reach solutions on matters concerning workplace conditions.

SECURING A STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND TEACHERS’ UNIONS

Conflict between unions and reform has best been avoided not where unions are weak but where they are strong and co-operate with reform.

Unions are sometimes perceived as interfering with promising school reform programs by giving higher priority to the unions’ “bread and butter” issues than to what the evidence suggests students need to succeed. But the fact is that many of the countries with the strongest student performance also have strong teachers’ unions, and the better a country’s education system performs, the more likely that country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners.⁴⁸

The discussion at the Summit revealed that there are different models of union-government relationships around the world. As the summary from the Summit notes, while 85% of teachers are members of the union in Norway, less than half of Polish teachers belong to the union. In Asia, some high-performing systems like Japan and Hong Kong have strong unions, while others, such as Singapore and China have teacher organizations that provide representation and professional development but do not engage in collective bargaining. In the Netherlands, there is a professional teachers association that is separate from the union.⁴⁹

As illustrated in Box 4.4, issues of collective bargaining can be successfully separated from professional issues, where teachers and their organizations collaborate with ministry staff in self-governing bodies to oversee work on entry, discipline, and the professional development of teachers.

Last but not least, teachers’ unions have developed their research capacities significantly in recent years. Their research units have also developed international links, principally through the Research Network of Education International. Within countries, there is evidence of growing links between union researchers and their counterparts in ministries and those in independent research institutes and universities. These developments are important because they can facilitate a constructive dialogue based on research and evidence.



Box 4.4. Successful collaboration in Ontario

Ontario's educational reforms were accepted by teachers because the government consulted them on its implementation and ensured that it was implemented by professionals, not bureaucrats.

In 2003, the Canadian province of Ontario initiated a comprehensive reform to raise graduation rates as well as literacy and numeracy standards. This featured (1) strategies directly focused on improving the act of teaching; (2) careful and detailed attention to implementation, along with opportunities for teachers to practice new ideas and learn from their colleagues; (3) a single, integrated strategy and one set of expectations for both teachers and students; and (4) support for the reforms from teachers. Of all of these points, the last one, gaining teacher support, has been widely regarded as the most important element.

Central to this was the signing of a four-year collective bargaining agreement with the four major teachers' unions. In reaching the accord, the ministry for education was able to negotiate items that were consistent with both its educational strategy and the unions' interests, thus providing a basis for pushing forward the education agenda while creating a sustained period of labor peace that allowed for continued focus on educational improvement.

The ministry for education devoted significant efforts to winning over teachers, schools, and unions to its vision of reform. It had a clear theory of where responsibilities lay. The role of the ministry for education was to set clear expectations and targets, provide funding, create a working collective-bargaining agreement that would support improved teaching and learning, offer external expertise, and propose support for struggling schools. The role of the district was to align its personnel and hiring policies with the overall strategy, and to support the schools as they went through continuous processes of learning. The role of the school was considered crucial, as the place where change needed to occur; and while the mission and pressure came from the top, the role of non-school contributors to the reform was to support the learning and change occurring in the schools.

At a political level, those leading the reforms made a point of involving teachers and their representatives. The deputy minister met quarterly with their main unions, with superintendents' organizations, and with principal associations to review progress. The ministry for education also created the Ontario Education Partnership Table where a wider range of stakeholders could meet with ministry officials two to four times a year. This led to Working Tables, where smaller groups of stakeholders worked in more detail on particular issues. Important to these efforts was the signing of a four-year collective bargaining agreement with the four major teachers' unions in 2005, covering 2004 to 2008. In this agreement, the ministry for education was able to negotiate changes consistent with both the educational strategy and the unions' interests, including a reduction of class size and the creation of extra preparation time, which led to the creation of 5 000 and 2 000 new jobs, respectively. The agreement also provided money to hire a full or part-time staff member in each school who was responsible for student success. A second four-year agreement was signed in 2008.

To follow through on the reforms, the ministry for education developed a comprehensive implementation strategy. The ministry for education created a new 100-person secretariat responsible for building the capacity and expertise to implement the literacy and numeracy initiatives in elementary schools. This was separate from the ministry for education, and was thus able to start fresh without the usual bureaucratic obstacles. The reform also involved creating teams in each district and each school to lead the work on literacy and numeracy. In so doing, the ministry for education paired external expertise with sustained internal time and leadership to push the initiative. The transformation team of teachers, principals and subject-matter specialists had deep, on-the-ground experience that earned them the respect of teachers and schools, rather than being seen as representing a bureaucracy.

The strategy also sought to ensure that reform was really a two-way street and not something imposed from above.

The government pursued a similar strategy for the Student Success initiative in high schools. Rather than sending out a team from the ministry for education, they gave the districts money to hire a "Student Success leader" to co-ordinate efforts in their district. The ministry for education also gave money for the district leaders to meet and share strategies. Again, each high school was given support to hire a provincially-funded Student Success teacher and was required to create a Student Success team to identify students showing early signs of academic struggle and to design appropriate interventions.



Box 4.5. Transforming government-union relations in the United States

In Montgomery County, Maryland, a collaborative model for raising performance was agreed with unions.

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is the sixteenth largest district in the United States. Long seen as a wealthy enclave, the county was becoming increasingly urbanized in 1999. Broad Acres Elementary School, located in a racially diverse neighborhood in the county's southeast corner, epitomized the challenges facing MCPS. Its students had performed so poorly on state assessments that the school qualified for restructuring. The school system faced the prospect of implementing a full-scale improvement process.

Neither school system leaders nor the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) believed school staff should be replaced. Instead, in 2000, collaboration between teachers and administration brought Broad Acres back from the brink and realized student-achievement levels commensurate with their peers in far wealthier areas of the county. And that is where Broad Acres has remained for the past eight years. Many schools throughout the county have replicated this process of targeted school improvement.

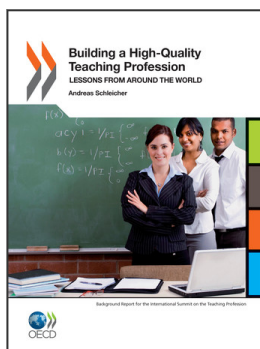
The collaborative culture has fostered both trust and engagement among all employee groups. An evolving outcome has been the development of three Professional Growth Systems (PGS) – for teachers, administrators, and support staff – each with a supportive Peer Assistance and Review component that allows for novice and underperforming staff to be mentored and returned to successful employment or removed from service if improvement is insufficient. The PGS integrates qualitative evaluation and professional growth. The teachers' PGS, for example, is based on six standards of performance derived from core propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. It offers training for evaluators and teachers in order to establish a common language of successful teaching; establishes a professional growth cycle, in which a formal evaluation year is followed by sequential years dedicated to professional growth; provides for a job-embedded professional development program; and includes multiple factors in identifying teachers who will be involuntarily transferred.

In April 2010, MCEA and MCPS signed an agreement to affirm the use of student-performance data, including student and parent surveys, as required evidence for two of the six performance standards for evaluation. That initiative is representative of a shared focus on doing what's best for students.

Box 4.6. Establishing career incentives in Norway

In Norway, governments and unions have co-operated to enhance and recognize teachers' competence.

The Union of Education Norway (UEN) had long considered that there were too few career incentives for teachers. Existing career structures meant that teachers stopped teaching or taught less when they entered positions of educational leadership. In the 2008 negotiations with the central organization for local and regional governments, the UEN suggested introducing a new and higher wage scale for teachers to be promoted on the basis of competence. The suggestion was accepted, and procedures were agreed to promote highly competent teachers, as identified by the school leader. In 2008 the Norwegian Ministry of Education, the central organization for local and regional governments, the organization for teacher education institutions, and the UEN formed a partnership to introduce a system for in-service education for teachers. Around 2 000 full-time study places in colleges and universities have been set aside for full or part-time studies. Teachers who participate are granted leave of absence with full pay for 80% of normal study time. Costs for substitute teachers are shared between the central government and the local employer. However, even though there is agreement between the central government and the other important stakeholders about these and other national initiatives to enhance teacher competence, the actual implementation must be decided by the local governments as employers, a total of 430 municipalities and 19 counties. Both for economic and political reasons, many employers have not implemented these initiatives in practice.



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