

2021 International Summit on the Teaching Profession

A Briefing by Education International

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Education International

2021

International Summit on the Teaching Profession

Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future: Excellence and Equity for All



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale

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2021

International Summit on the Teaching Profession



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Welcome and Introduction

by David Edwards,
General Secretary of Education International

Since the Covid Pandemic began in early 2020, societies across the world have experienced the most profound upheaval. Many people have died, and many others have experienced hardship and loss. Economies have struggled to function. Societies have undergone enormous strain. Public services have been under enormous pressure to provide quality services, particularly health services. Education has faced particular turbulence. Last year, the majority of countries across the world had to close their school buildings for an average of eight months.

For that reason, in my introduction to our Briefing for last year's Summit, I emphasised EI's core belief, that education represents humanity's guarantee for a better future and that schools are at the heart of their communities, providing students with a love of learning and their optimism for the future.

A year on, I profoundly believe that this belief is even more relevant. While the pandemic remains an ever-present threat, education jurisdictions are planning and implementing their recovery. Teachers and school communities have shown enormous resilience, constantly innovating in order to educate and protect students. Many countries have continued to learn from each other. They also understand that positive educational changes and improvements cannot be embedded without partnership between governments and teacher unions. Countries' commitment to the ISTPs as a unique forum for learning, remains undimmed despite the pandemic.

This year, I very much welcome the fact that the United States, the original host and founder of the ISTPs, has agreed to host the 2021 Summit and I want to recognise the contribution of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers who, alongside the US Government, have supported the Summits from their beginning.

The overarching theme for the Summit could not be more relevant. Covid has not only stress tested society in general, but it has also stress tested education systems' ability to respond in equitable, effective and meaningful ways. There are other increasing causes of stress in education systems as well, including the need for developed countries in an interconnected world to live up to their responsibilities for refugees fleeing war, climate disaster and societal collapse, most recently, from Afghanistan.

Past ISTPs have built and learnt from each other. In order to look to the future, it is critical to build on what works and not to repeat what has failed. It also critical for countries to understand that unless all societies are safe

no-one is safe. Building back better from Covid depends on this. Dialogue and collaboration are the essence of innovation. Excellence and Equity for All in education cannot be achieved without this understanding.

I want to thank our partner in the Summits, the OECD. The OECD has consistently supported the ISTPs since their inception. I'm proud of the fact that EI and the OECD have agreed the *Principles for Effective and Equitable Educational Recovery* (EI/OECD 2021). I believe they will make a real contribution to dialogue in this Summit and beyond about how education recovery can be made to work for every student in our education systems.

I also want to thank our Spanish colleagues for their continuing commitment to the Summits. They had planned the 2020 ISTP which had to be postponed. Yet the Spanish Minister introduced the 2020 Virtual Summit, and the Spanish Government has committed to hosting the 2022 in-person Summit.

Education has enormous transformative power. It is essential to social and economic stability. It is essential to tackling existential challenges such as climate change, disease, poverty and environmental degradation. The ISTPs have the capacity to convince governments that high quality education for all is essential if humanity is to have an optimistic future.



David Edwards
General Secretary
Education International

Excellence and Equity

Education International and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development published the *Ten Principles* because both organisations believe that equity should be front and centre of all plans for educational recovery plans if recovery is to be successful. We believe that the best way of achieving this is by education authorities and the teaching profession and its organisations collaborating. The twin objectives of the Principles focus on the enhancement of students' development, growth and well-being and reducing the achievement gap widened by the crisis. (EI/OECD *ibid.*) The Principles also draw on the experiences of both organisations in working together to help to plan the Summits since their inception.

Equity is not solely an individual moral and well-being issue; it is about making sure that, irrespective of gender or background, all students' potential knowledge, creativity and inventiveness can contribute to the social and economic well-being of society.

The pandemic has disproportionately affected the educational opportunities of disadvantaged students; in some countries, exacerbating the fault lines in current provision. Both EI and the OECD believe that *the crisis created by the pandemic must lead to a recovery which addresses inequality. The needs of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and those particularly affected by the crisis.... must receive additional focus and support... This effort to tackle reduced learning opportunities and the social emotional consequences*

of the pandemic on students' lives should be based on system wide diagnosis and assessment. (OECD-Education International 2021)

System-wide assessment and diagnosis of students' needs are vital if educational recovery is to work for every student. Education International has called for educational jurisdictions to carry out equity audits in order to provide comprehensive evidence for action plans. (Education International 2020). Many countries will have started to carry out an investigation of students' needs. The question is whether such diagnosis and assessment are carried out in partnership with school communities? Such partnership could involve the establishment of bodies, whether ad hoc or permanent, which include relevant researchers, and representatives of educational jurisdictions, teacher unions and those involved in the governance of school communities to oversee the gathering of evidence.

At the same time sources of evidence collection need to be strengthened and diversified so that the information on students' learning, students and teachers' well-being, and the effects on students of disadvantage is rich and relevant. Educational research and the gathering of evidence by education systems need to be far more aligned. The involvement of all sectors of education and all education stakeholders in evidence collection will be essential. The same principle should apply to system wide evaluations of recovery programmes (E1/ OECD *ibid.*)

Achieving equity in learning opportunities is a multifaceted challenge. Inequities in learning opportunities have been exposed by Covid. In many areas of learning there still remain sharp gender disparities which require constant analysis and vigilance. Many countries have experienced waves of immigration of refugees displaced by war and migrants influenced by economic pressures. The 2016 ISTP in Berlin highlighted how unions and educational jurisdictions alike were tackling these challenges (Education International 2016). These demands on education systems will grow especially with the collapse of Afghanistan as a democratic state.

EI believed then and believes now that the social and moral purpose of teaching means that the teaching profession should be integrally involved in defining what is needed for additional support for teachers whose students have an increasingly diverse set of needs whether they are influenced by social and economic disadvantage or by the destruction of civil societies.

The 2014 ISTP in New Zealand came nearest to quantifying what that support should look like. Both EI and the OECD pressed for a structural shift of approach towards supporting schools with high numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Education International 2014 and OECD 2014).

In its briefing, EI proposed that this approach should include: providing sufficient learning resources to address disadvantage without penalising other school communities; ensuring that teaching professions reflected students' demography, preparing teachers on how they respond to the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, making sure that working conditions and career structures encourage the most experienced teachers to work in disadvantaged schools and encouraging teachers to stay by guaranteeing employment and job security. It also

argued that an essential part of teachers' initial teacher training and professional development should be to include responding to the needs of children from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds with unions having a key role in providing professional development.

Seven years on, this focus on disadvantage remains as relevant as ever, if not more so. Both EI and OECD have emphasised that, *governments will need to provide supportive institutions, funding and regulatory frameworks for an effective and equitable recovery that prioritises students who have suffered the most from the crisis....education decision makers will need the necessary and stable funding to develop appropriate strategies to regenerate education and narrow the achievement gap...* (EI/OECD *ibid.*). This approach will necessarily have to respond to the needs of increasing numbers of students who are refugees. Indeed, education jurisdictions will need to review their funding formulae to make sure that they respond equitably to the new circumstances facing education. Necessary and stable funding is at the heart of educational recovery and vital for meeting the needs of all students.

Policy Implications

What steps can countries and unions take together to make sure that evidence on student need is gathered which can feed into inclusive, practical and effective policy making for educational recovery? What are the arrangements which could bring together policy makers, teacher unions, school communities and researchers to share their knowledge of student need? What steps need to be taken to secure the funding necessary to put education at the centre of societies' recovery from the pandemic and to ensure that it is robust enough to respond to new challenges?

Schools at the Centres of their Communities

Both the OECD and EI have emphasised that the pandemic has highlighted the essential role of schools in the education of children and young people (EI/OECD *ibid.*). Closures have made policy makers and the public understand how important the schools are as places which facilitate social interaction. Indeed, EI believes that the importance of social interaction extends beyond schools and into their local communities. Most schools, particularly those in the public sector, are integral to their communities. Indeed, the quality of the social basis of learning in schools is enhanced by their outward facing relationships with their local communities. The value parents and students place on schools is mirrored by the communities that surround them. Communities that lose their schools are impoverished by their loss. In socially divided and economically impoverished areas, schools represent order and calm. They create for students an ethos of mutual respect and optimism for the future while providing them with a sense of security and safe spaces to learn.

The first time that an ISTP explored the policy implications of recognising that schools are at the centre of their communities was at the 2018 Summit in Portugal. The OECD's Background Document (Schleicher, 2018) included a range of examples of developments in community and extended schools and in school networks in the United States, the UK (Northern Ireland), the Flemish Community of Belgium, Portugal, Finland and Japan. The focus of the Summit's discussion was on how to align resources

with needs, fostering community linkages between schools, designing admissions policies to reduce segregation, the impact of school choice on school communities and supporting disadvantaged schools. Indeed, the Summit noted that disadvantaged communities and schools within them needed much greater support than more economically secure communities (Asia Society *ibid.*, 2018).

Education International's Briefing emphasised that public education systems were best placed to provide coherent support to their schools in their communities but that few countries had yet taken the initiative to think hard about how to enhance the vital role of schools in their communities. It highlighted research which found that while the majority of young people were pessimistic about the future, students in schools which engaged them in global and local realities were much more optimistic (Education International, 2018).

Three years on Covid has placed enormous demands on schools and their communities. Teachers have been responsible for an infinite number of micro-innovations, including new ways of securing student safety, responding to students' mental health needs and acting to improve student well-being, developing remote learning, adapting the curriculum, replacing external assessments with their own assessments and maintaining links with parents and local communities. These innovations have taken place despite the fact that student access to remote learning provision has been uneven in many

countries as has teacher access to digital training (EI-OECD *ibid.*).

There is a great deal for education systems to learn from about how school communities responded to the pandemic. There is also a great deal of learning that school communities could share if they had the time and support to do so including about how schools and local communities related to each other.

The EI-OECD's Principles propose a range of measures including the necessity for securing equitable and sufficient digital support for schools. Digital infrastructures, equitably available to all schools, developed in collaboration with the teaching profession and school communities could both support teachers in sharing practice and ideas and enable school communities to build on what has worked and not to repeat what has failed.

Certainly, future system wide policies need to include a focus on how to support schools in enhancing the relationship between schools and their communities in ways which benefit students' learning and the work of teachers. It is clear also that the current enhanced understanding of the value of schools as centres for student well-being and learning needs to be translated into public policy.

Policy Implications

Is there an opportunity for teacher unions and governments to commission jointly research on innovations within schools during Covid and on the role of schools within their communities? Could the results of this research feed into jurisdiction policy proposals developed jointly with teacher unions about securing and defining the role of schools in post-Covid recovery?

Is there an opportunity for teacher unions and governments to evaluate the effectiveness of their current Digital Infrastructures in supporting education and to explore the development of education infrastructures which guarantee all schools and students' equal access to learning technologies?

The Whole Child

The importance of meeting the needs of the whole child, including their well-being needs, has been highlighted by the impact of Covid. School closures triggered by Covid have widened the learning and well-being gap between students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. The socio-economic background and educational background of parents has had an even greater influence on student achievement and well-being as a result of students being required to study at home for long periods.

In many countries there may be significant numbers of people who have long term illness as a result of Covid and many who have lost family members. According to a study by the Lancet involving 21 countries an estimated 1.5 million children worldwide under the age of 18 have lost a parent, grandparent or caregiver due to Covid (Guardian, 2021). There may also be significant increases in child malnourishment particularly since the gap in student learning can widen during the summer holidays. Positive improvements in the mental health and well-being of students will be the key to recovery of their learning.

EI welcomes the compilation of evidence on supporting the whole child in the OECD's Background Document for the 2021 Summit (Schleicher, 2021). There will be very many school communities which believe they now need to have an enhanced focus on students' well-being as a result of the pandemic. Certainly, student behaviour has a major effect on the self-efficacy and capacity of teachers to

teach; with the pandemic having its specific influence on student behaviour.

During school closures teachers often found themselves juggling two curricula; one defined by whether it could be taught on-line and the other for in-school learning. Teachers' enhanced focus on responding to the individual needs of students during school closures and their experiences of hybrid and remote learning has, for many, raised questions about the adequacy of the curricula and their evaluation of what they are required to implement. For many it has also emphasised the need to enhance their professional control over pedagogies.

Countries' educational goals and criteria for success drawn from the OECD's Learning Compass 2030 (Schleicher, 2021 *ibid.*) illustrate the varying focus of individual countries' overarching curriculum objectives. They also illustrate that curriculum objectives are at their most effective and relevant when schools believe them to be fundamentally useful for students' learning. Inflexible, over-detailed and imposed National Curriculum and assessment arrangements are far less likely to be relevant to schools than flexible framework curricula which enable and give space to schools to develop and innovate. External evaluation of student achievement has been challenged by the pandemic and there is now a window of opportunity for new forms of evaluation to be created which more accurately describe levels of student achievement.

The understanding that schools must have the capacity to meet the needs of

the whole child can only be successfully realised if teachers feel they are trusted and have the support to meet that goal.

School curricula should be capable of change to respond to new realities and to instil in students the belief, optimism and motivation that they have the power to initiate positive change to confront the existential threats facing the world. For example, how to teach about the threat of climate change and the need for sustainable development is a fundamental question which is being increasingly asked by society as well as by teachers. The successful creation of curricula responsive to the challenges of the 21st Century is the outcome of partnerships between schools, the teaching profession and its unions and educational jurisdictions. However, while there is evidence that most governments of OECD countries consult teachers and their unions on curriculum reform, a recent survey of unions in the OECD found that only 27% of unions were involved in initiating curriculum reform compared with higher percentages for initiating reforms in teachers' pay/compensation and working conditions (MacBeath et al., 2020). Yet as EI and the OECD have said: central to educational recovery programmes should be a focus on supporting a teaching profession that is actively engaged in the design of learning environments and public policy, in the advancement of professional practice, and in creating a stronger professional work organisation (EI/OECD *ibid.*).

Internationally EI, UNESCO and the OECD are highlighting the importance of education about climate change in schools. Recently the OECD hosted a joint webinar with EI and UNESCO on exploring ways of gathering evidence from teachers on how to include teaching about climate change in the curriculum (EI 2021 and OECD 2021).

Policy Implications

Is there an opportunity for teacher unions and governments to agree a joint approach to curriculum reform which will draw on evidence about the impact of school closures, and remote and hybrid learning on student learning and well-being? Could this joint approach encompass reforms of student evaluation? Would this joint approach include changes to the curriculum which would respond to the need to include learning about the existential challenges facing the world? Could teacher unions and governments jointly review and agree additional approaches to student counselling and support as part of educational recovery packages?

Teacher well-being

When teachers feel positive about themselves and their work, they know they can make a positive difference to students' learning. Six years ago, the Canadian ISTP explored the links between teacher self-efficacy and leadership. In its background document for the Summit, the OECD concluded that teacher well-being had a positive relationship with student progress. It said that while creating positive teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction was important, it wasn't the whole story. Research had suggested that there were... *positive associations between both self-efficacy and job satisfaction and student achievement. Indeed...high levels of teacher self-efficacy* (were) also associated with student motivation and other positive teacher behaviours (Schleicher, 2015).

A plenary session of the 2018 ISTP focussed on teacher well-being and the ISTP Report of the Summit concluded that teacher well-being was an issue whose time had come. The evidence on teachers' sources of stress from TALIS 2018 is invaluable in that it provides a benchmark for evidence on the levels of teacher stress now in the second year of the pandemic.

We know from EI member organisation surveys, the OECD and research from individual countries that many teachers suffer poor, stress-related mental health and that access to mental health services for teachers is highly uneven. Excessive administrative demands, variable and inadequate professional development particularly for ICT, being held responsible for student achievement and keeping up with changing requirements are key

triggers for poor teacher well-being. Beginning/novice teachers are certainly vulnerable to poor well-being particularly since disproportionate numbers of new teachers start teaching in socially disadvantaged schools. (OECD 2020), (Education International 2018 *ibid*), (Education Support 2020)

EI's commissioned survey of its member organisations, the Global Report on the Status of Teachers 2021, identified teacher attrition, workload, stress and well-being as key issues for the reform of conditions facing the school workforce globally. (Thompson 2021) One further factor which may undermine teacher well-being is excessive class size. Burns et al have found a significant correlation between class sizes and teacher shortages across countries (Burns and Darling-Hammond, 2014).

The evidence from TALIS and other studies is that teacher well-being matters. Teacher leadership and collaboration, supportive working conditions, pay/compensation which matches that of comparable professions, and relevant professional development contribute to high levels of teacher well-being and job satisfaction and crucially contribute to the quality of student learning. Indeed, there is an integral relationship between teacher well-being and student well-being.

How has the evidence on teacher well-being and its relationship to student achievement and well-being been affected by the pandemic? The pandemic has certainly placed school communities

under significant strain. Yet teachers have responded by adapting to changing circumstances with constant micro-innovations. School communities have demonstrated leadership in responding to the pandemic. Leadership by classroom teachers has been essential in maintaining education. If Covid has highlighted the importance of schools as the essential hubs of learning it has also shown that the professional autonomy, confidence and skills of teachers need enhancing and supporting.

As the EI and the OECD have said:

Since teachers and schools continue to be at the centre of student learning now and in the future, their working conditions and professional learning need to be fit for purpose in supporting their work both during the pandemic and in post pandemic recovery... Teachers' job satisfaction, well-being, beliefs and professionalism are interrelated and have an effect on student outcomes... With teachers and their unions, jurisdictions and education authorities should review teachers' working conditions in order to identify those areas that need to be improved for teachers to be the most effective during the pandemic (and post-pandemic recovery). Such efforts could be particularly beneficial in the most disadvantaged schools, whose teachers are most likely to face unfavourable working conditions. This review will remain essential during the post-pandemic recovery (EI/OECD, ibid).

In short, EI and OECD believe that there is a strong case in many countries for governments and teacher unions to work together to improve teachers' working conditions as part of post pandemic recovery strategies. The opportunity for countries to put teacher well-being at the centre of teacher policies should now be taken. Recruiting and retaining high quality teaching professions depends on it.

Teacher leadership and well-being

Teacher well-being is largely dependent on the way in which leadership is perceived in schools. There are those who believe that strong, top-down leadership is the only way that schools can deliver high quality education. This belief has become increasingly discredited. Distributed leadership which provides the conditions for all teachers to show leadership in practice and policy has become increasingly linked to sustained improvements in student outcomes and well-being.

In 2012, Education International published a study by Cambridge University: *Teacher Self-Efficacy, Voice and Leadership: Towards a Policy Framework* for Education International which reviewed the evidence on the links between teacher well-being, efficacy, motivation and student achievement and set out seven dimensions for creating the conditions for teacher leadership to flourish (Education International with Cambridge University, 2012).

In short, there is a seamless relationship between teacher well-being, teacher self-efficacy and teacher leadership. The correlation between these factors and student achievement is too strong to ignore. For this reason, EI believes that *the realisation of the OECD proposal that, policy makers should consider providing guidance on distributed leadership and distributed decision making at a system level*, is long overdue in many countries (OECD, 2014).

It also means that the nature of teacher leadership and how it evolves is very much alive and relevant to ISTP 2021. EI welcomes therefore the publication of the discussion paper on teacher leadership for whole child education, by Barnett Berry, Linda Darling-Hammond and Anthony Mackay, which draws on research about teacher effectiveness, school leadership

and innovation focussing particularly on evidence from the pandemic. (Berry, Darling-Hammond and Mackay 2021). Its argument, that top-down leadership is out of sync with the new normal of collective social capital which educators have had to develop during the pandemic, connects with the evidence I gathered during the pandemic and with the evidence of other global organisations.

The organisation of education is in flux in many countries, but it may well be that, as Berry et al's paper says, the next generation of community schools, which are grounded in a holistic vision of child, family and community development, is on the horizon. The education of the whole child, which is a key theme of ISTP 2021, can only take place in collaborative conditions, not in environments where school managements issue orders to the workforce. As the paper implies, teacher leadership draws as much on the informal teaching and learning carried out by teachers as does teacher engagement in more formal systems which recognise and use teachers' expertise.

Whether a fresh consideration of teacher leadership should lead to a new approach to teachers' career structures is open for productive discussion, but one thing is clear. The paper enhances the argument that teachers' working conditions need to be reviewed with the aim of improving them and that teacher well-being, efficacy and leadership should be at the centre of any review.

Policy Implications.

What has been learnt about the fitness for purpose of teachers' working conditions during the pandemic? Is there an opportunity for teacher unions and governments to review jointly teachers' working conditions drawing on lessons learnt in the pandemic? What role does teacher leadership have in any review? Alongside any national studies on teacher well-being, could governments and unions now take up the opportunity to share and learn from evidence on improving teacher well-being?

Collaborating to Build Back Better

It is ten years since the US hosted the first ISTP in New York. Since then, the Summits have addressed themes fundamental to education systems and the teaching profession. Each Summit has contributed to subsequent Summits leading to an accumulating body of unique knowledge and practice (Asia Society, 2011-2019).

The 2021 Summit's title, *Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future: Excellence and Equity for All* is a good description of the cumulative value of previous Summits and their relevance to education systems rebuilding after Covid. Education International's Briefings have consistently sought to contribute to Summit discussions by highlighting what it believes to be the policy implications of Summit themes. The overarching theme, 'How can governments, teacher organisations and schools, as centres of their communities, collaborate around the future of education and the whole child to build back better and provide an excellent education for all?' contains a question about how the fundamental goals in the theme can be achieved collaboratively. This was referred to in the OECD's background paper for the first Summit ten years ago: *...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 (it is) that each country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners* (Schleicher, 2011).

It is a finding which is similar, ten years on from the first ISTP, to Education International's commissioned Global Report on the Status of Teachers 2021 *which proposes the concept of intelligent professionalism whereby teachers, principals, and their elected association/ union representatives should always be the 'insiders' in the various processes and mechanisms that systems argue are improving education* (Thompson, 2021 *ibid.*).

Constructive collaboration between education jurisdictions and teacher unions on education reform requires trust and respect for differing views, an optimistic mindset that no problem is too big to be solved, an investment of time and resources in negotiation and taking responsibility for joint policy decisions. Collaboration is the essence of pluralism and intelligent professionalism and will be vital if education systems are to build back better.

The enormous task of collaborating around the future of education in order to provide an excellent education for all may require innovations in the forms and structures of negotiation and consultation between the teaching profession, its unions and governments.

Policy Implications

Do education jurisdictions and unions think their current negotiating and consultative arrangements are fit for purpose for post pandemic recovery in education? Could any reviews of current arrangements draw on lessons learnt internationally from educational recovery? Are the processes of implementation and evaluation of education reforms included within negotiating and consultation arrangements?

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Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions and associations, representing thirty million education employees in about four hundred organisations in one hundred and seventy countries and territories, across the globe. Education International unites teachers and education employees.



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